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CONTENTS

September 3, 2026

From the Editors - 4

To have and to hold

The Reader Beat Recap: September 2026 - 6

A summary of August meetings

Returning Ready to Learn - 7

How Erie’s Public Schools and families build a future-ready Erie

Regular Columns - 10

Bird of the Month, Edwina Tries..., Take Your Beer for a Walk, Gem City Style, and Tree Talk

A Lesson in Choosing from the Nation’s Former Mom-in-Chief - 16

Michelle Obama comes to Erie on Oct. 12th for a conversation at the Erie Insurance Arena

Shelf Life: The Stories of Four Local Physical Media Collectors - 20

The analog artifacts of books, games, comics, and records

Bringing 1812 Into the 21st Century - 24

A national museum on the shores of Lake Erie’s bayfront

Erie’s Zine Scene: Past and Present - 27

Why DIY self-publishing in real life has, and always will, be a thing

This American Song Moves Forward to Play It in Reverse - 30

How the Erie band stayed active over 15 years, evolving into a collective art project

Spotlight on Erie - 32

Go analog baby! You’re so postmodern! Late Night at the Movies! Gem City Ren Fest! Lake Erie Lit Fest! Come From Away! And More!

Closer to Fine: Folk Rock Duo The Indigo Girls Come to Chautauqua - 42

An interview with Emily Saliers ahead of their regional performance

Album Reviews - 43

The latest cuts from locals Tony Grey featuring Bob James and Matt “Broke” Boland with Phoebe Bridgers and Weezer

Local Original Comics - 44

The latest from Tommy Link, Anthony Carson, Brad Pattullo, Nick Warren, Bryan Toy, and John Bavaro

Mabeline’s Poetry Corner - 45

YOU BELIEVED

Film Reviews - 46

Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma and Coyote vs. Acme

Crossword Puzzle - 47

The latest stumper from Matt Jones, Jonesin’ Crosswords



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From the Editors

To have and to hold

What does it mean to own something these days? Increasingly, products that used to have a place in our homes, on our shelves, or in our collections are becoming subscribable, rentable, intangible, and therefore truly unowned. How many services do you currently subscribe to that give you nothing concrete in return? How many more internet-based products are going to go this way? How many artists, writers, and musicians are being raked over the coals? How many more data centers do we have to build to support all of it? Does anyone actually want this?

And how do you get your information these days? How do you learn about local events, businesses, products, artists? On community corkboards in local businesses? By picking up a paper copy of the Erie Reader at your local stop? Through flyers handed out at shows or pasted up on telephone poles? Or is it more likely on social media? Where artists, musicians, and business owners have to become content creators in order to get their posts noticed? Where so much clickbait turns into ragebait turns into people turning on each other in an imaginary world? Where every application comes with a little AI devil on its shoulder asking you if you want to make this easier, faster, more productive? Aren't we all just so damn sick of it?

You might notice something a little bit different about this September issue of the Erie Reader. What has historically been known as our Back to School issue has undergone a little bit of a throwback. We're instead calling it the Back to (Old) School issue, and taking the opportunity to celebrate the feeling that comes from a job well done, done with our hands. Our cover this month, compiled and photographed by our very own award-winning graphic designer Nick Warren, is a physical, actual, real-life corkboard with physical, actual, real-life flyers, stickers, posters, and ads pinned to it and then photographed.

You'll see this theme throughout the issue – in a feature by Larry Wheaton in which he gets to know a handful of physical media collectors and why they think it's important to preserve the notion of ownership, to hold their owned objects in their hands. A

feature by the aforementioned Nick Warren about a band in Erie who has recorded their music onto all the different forms of physical media. Edwina tries a day of unplugging from the internet and finds herself a little more plugged in to real life. And yours truly took a step back in time to the mid-'90s, reading through 15 issues of a local zine called *R.T.R.*, produced as a labor of love for the local music scene, wanting to make something, put it out into the world, and to help the Erie community become a little more connected in a time before the internet convinced us it could do it better.

In the introduction of that zine feature (that you can find on page 27), I paint a picture of what life

As the world speeds up faster and faster, the Erie Reader invites you to slow down for a moment – pick up a paper and read words written by humans, look at art made by humans, and feel a little more human in that moment.

was like as a teenager in the '90s. And to avoid falling into the “kids these days” trap (because I often find myself right there with the kids), I will say that the way I interacted with the world, with physical media, with other people, and really the way my brain worked was just different back then (how many people these days can relate to thinking about the post they're going to make about something while they're actively experiencing it? That doesn't feel quite normal).

The only way that we can combat the increasingly digitized, dehumanized, intangible world of all-things-internet-all-the-time – is to stop. Back up. Ask yourself if there isn't a slightly more difficult way to do something, but a way that will ultimately feel so much better. Rather than the knee-jerk of instantly sharing what we experience on social media, what if we didn't? What if we got off the ham-



This community cork board at Brew Ha Ha, which served as inspiration for our cover this month, is the perfect example of using physical resources to promote an event or business – this small effort is one way to subvert the constant push towards social media as the only promotional avenue.

ster wheel that gets us nowhere, exhausts us, and offers us nothing in return?

The Erie Reader has been singing this song for 15 years now – we are stubbornly free (our subscription model is completely good-faith, donor-based) and stubbornly committed to remaining a tangible piece of print media. As the world speeds up faster and faster, the Erie Reader invites you to slow down for a moment – pick up a paper and read words written by humans, look at art made by humans, and feel a little more human in that moment.

The way that physical media succeeds in an increasingly digital world is when people support it – buy that CD or record from the band that you love and give money directly to them (I promise you they will just use it to make more music that you'll love), buy that piece of art from the maker selling it, print out flyers and hand them out to kids at the mall to advertise your band's show, and, if there ever was an issue to do it, PICK UP AN ERIE READER IN PRINT. Especially if you're used to reading our stories online, give flipping through an Erie Reader over a cup of coffee at your Sunday breakfast table a try. Talk to your loved ones about something you learned or remembered or admired within it. Slow down a minute and hold that paper in your hands – it belongs to you now.

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NEWS & OPINION

The Reader Beat Recap: September 2026

A summary of August meetings

By Alana Sabol

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

City Council Aug. 5: Mayor Devlin presented the mid-year budget report. She reported that the city's spending cuts and revenue-seeking has reduced the \$8 million deficit to \$5.2 million. "While this is good progress, we recognize that it just represents a fraction of that total deficit and we have much more work to do to close the full amount."

During public comments, former City Councilwoman Susannah Faulkner discussed an ordinance on the agenda that renews the Erie Police Department's subscription for ShotSpotter, a technology that aims to detect and alert law enforcement of gunshots through auditory sensors. Faulkner cited a study by the ACLU of Massachusetts which found that approximately 70 percent of alerts in Boston showed no evidence of gunfire. "If we're able to lay off people, if we're able to end other essential parts of city hall and make cuts all around, then why would we extend \$280,000 to a tech company for surveillance?" Faulkner said.

A year-long contract for ShotSpotter subscription services for the Bureau of Police at a cost not to exceed \$280,000.00 passed 6-1 with Titus voting no. Schaaf explained her reasoning for supporting the ordinance, "This, to me, is a part of safety," she said. "Chief Lorah mentioned that crimes have been solved, homicides have been solved."

City Council Aug. 19: During public comments, Clayton Bradshaw-Mittal, Ph.D., spoke about the ShotSpotter subscription ordinance. "There's no impact on the root causes of gun violence nor on occurrence of gun violence," said Bradshaw-Mittal. A study from the Chicago Inspector General's office also found that some Chicago Police Department members interacted and perceived individuals differently in areas with a higher frequency of ShotSpotter alerts. Erie High teacher Andrani Foster Samuel spoke about an incident allegedly involving police and a young man who was searched and put

in a holding cell. "I'm just really hurt by what happened to him because he's a good kid and his family deserves justice. His mom deserves justice. He deserves justice. He did not deserve to be treated the way he was treated." Mayor Devlin encouraged Samuel to get in touch with her office to file a complaint.

An ordinance appropriating the sum of \$280,000 to fund expenditures associated with the City of Erie Police Department ShotSpotter subscription to improve law enforcement response time to areas where shots were fired passed 5-1, with Titus voting no.

of \$280,000 to fund expenditures associated with the City of Erie Police Department ShotSpotter Subscription to improve law enforcement response time to areas where shots were fired passed 5-1, with Titus voting no. Councilman Horton spoke in favor of the ordinance, saying: "I'm not looking at this personally as a permanent fixture in our tool belt, but I think it deserves some merit to consider and see how it goes."

County Council Aug. 25: Constituents discussed the ordinance that allows the public to use mobile devices during county council meetings. "I can appreciate you all taking a look at the Sunshine Act to make sure that we are actually following what we are supposed to be following," constituent Deonte Cooley said. The ordinance approving the temporary unlocking of mobile devices for individuals attending public county council meetings passed 4-3 with Schauerma, Bayle, and Drexel voting no. "The way we have been doing things is definitely not against the sunshine laws," Schauerma said, though the ordinance passed over her objection.

Coming up this month:
City Council: Sept. 2 at 9 a.m.
County Council: Sept. 8 at 6 p.m.
City Council: Sept. 16 at 6:30 p.m.
County Council: Sept. 22 at 6 p.m.

6 | Erie Reader | ErieReader.com

September 3, 2026

Returning Ready to Learn

How Erie’s Public Schools and families build a future-ready Erie

By Natalyn Gibbs, Ed.D., superintendent and CEO of Erie’s Public Schools

On the first day of school, many of our students walked a red carpet into their buildings.

It was quite literally a welcome back.

As I moved from school to school greeting students, families, and staff, I kept thinking about what our planning comes down to: a child walking through the doors, an educator waiting inside, and another opportunity to begin learning.

This year, those doors opened with some new faces too. Erie’s Public Schools welcomed more than 80 new teachers, joining hundreds of educators and staff who have committed themselves to our students. Just days earlier, close to 2,000 members of our EPS team gathered for our second annual convocation to celebrate and support the people who do this work every day, give focus for the year ahead, and continue building a culture where our staff know they are valued and are never expected to carry this work alone.

First days bring a lot of energy. But there is also a serious responsibility underneath that excitement.

Our academic outcomes remain well below where they need to be. Teachers are being asked to reach students who bring their whole lives into the classroom with them, including academic needs, family pressures, economic hardship, instability, grief,

Learn.

For us, it means getting better at the fundamentals that have always mattered: strong instruction, literacy, mathematics, attendance, relationships, responsibility, and high expectations. Going back to the basics means being deliberate about rebuilding the conditions in which students and teachers can do their best work.

"For us, [Return to Learn] means getting better at the fundamentals that have always mattered: strong instruction, literacy, mathematics, attendance, relationships, responsibility, and high expectations. Going back to the basics means being deliberate about rebuilding the conditions in which students and teachers can do their best work."

and worries that do not simply disappear at the school entrance.

What we can do is make sure that when students cross our thresholds, they enter schools organized around the most basic reason they are there: students come to school to learn.

That is the idea behind Return to

Learn. For many Erie families, standard school attire will look familiar. Similar expectations were part of everyday school life in EPS for years before the pandemic. We are restoring a clearer and more consistent baseline for the school day, while not pretending that a collared shirt by itself will change

academic outcomes.

Our bell-to-bell expectations for personal electronic devices address a different challenge. Putting phones away will not solve every problem in our schools either, and it is not intended to.

During the school day, students deserve some space from the constant stream of notifications, group chats, and social media that follows them almost everywhere else.

We want students available to their teachers. We want to see young people talking with one another at lunch. We want fewer interruptions competing with instruction and fewer opportunities for an online disagreement to immediately become a hallway conflict. We want students practicing conversation, patience, problem solving, and the increasingly important skill of simply being present with other people.

Clearer expectations around attire can help in a different way. Those ex-



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This year, the motto coming from Erie's Public Schools at parent information sessions like this one held at the JFK Center this summer is "Return to Learn," which means focusing on what matters and shutting out the noise. From cell phone restrictions to strengthening the district-wide dress code – the focus will be on learning, improving outcomes, and strengthening student success.

Expectations give families, students and staff a more predictable standard and can reduce some of the subjectivity that comes with deciding, student by student, what is or is not appropriate for school.

Still, creating an expectation also creates responsibilities for us.

I saw that during our five Return to Learn parent engagement sessions this month.

Hundreds of families came, gathered, asked questions, picked up the polo shirts and school pants we were distributing, and talked with us about what these changes would actually mean when school began.

At session after session, our Chief Accountability Officer ShaQuita Gatewood brought families back to a larger question: What does ready to learn look like before a child even walks through the school doors?

She talked about simple things, like putting the phone on the charger at a set time at night. Getting school clothes ready before morning. Talking

with your child about why expectations are changing rather than waiting for a teacher or principal to explain it to them after there is already a problem.

Those conversations captured Return to Learn better than any policy document could.

Families have an important role, but partnership works in both directions. Return to Learn cannot be something a school district does to families. It has to be something we build *with* them.

And if we ask students to arrive ready to learn, we owe them schools ready to teach.

That starts with instruction.

This year, Erie's Public Schools is renewing its districtwide focus on literacy because reading, writing, comprehension, and communication are foundational to nearly everything else students do.

A kindergartner learning to recognize words and a senior preparing for

college, a career, a skilled trade, or military service are at very different points in life. Both need schools that prepare them to think, communicate, solve problems, adapt, and continue learning.

Stronger expectations for students also have to come with stronger support for the educators serving them. As a teacher, I know we cannot demand more from educators without committing to giving them more.

A teacher should not be left alone to solve every academic, behavioral, social, or family challenge that enters a classroom. A principal should not have to figure out where to get assistance. And no one asking for help should be passed from one person to another.

That is one reason we changed how the district supports schools.

We have organized dedicated elementary and secondary support teams, clarified responsibility for student services, and brought together leaders with experience both inside Erie and with proven results in school systems across the country. The point is to bring support closer to classrooms, not farther away.

The people responsible for solving the same problems need to work together. Schools need to know where to turn, and trust that help will follow.

I have also had the support of a school board willing to make tough decisions, invest in the work, and stay focused on results while giving our educators and administrators the space to do their jobs.

My first year in Erie involved a great deal of listening, learning, and rebuilding. This year must be about action and accountability.

We now have a 5-year strategic plan. We have reorganized support

around schools.

We have clearer instructional priorities and clearer expectations for the learning environment.

But plans, policies and organizational charts only matter if students experience something better because of them.

We will look honestly at attendance, behavior, school climate, and academic progress.

We will listen to teachers, students, and families. We will recognize what is working, confront what is not, and adjust when the evidence tells us we should.

Students have a role too. We are asking them to come ready to participate, treat classmates and educators with respect, take responsibility when they make mistakes, and ask for help when they need it. We want them to bring their curiosity, ideas, personalities, and ambitions into our schools.

Ultimately, Return to Learn is about more than clothing, phones, or even one school year.

It is about Erie.

The students sitting in our classrooms today will become the ones who shape this city tomorrow. Which is why their success is not simply a school district issue, it is a community necessity.

Welcoming children through our doors is the easy part.

What happens after they cross that threshold is what matters.

Our children are here to learn.

Our job is to make sure they have every opportunity to do it.

Natalyn Gibbs, Ed.D., is the superintendent and CEO of Erie's Public Schools. Learn more about her and her mission to serve Erie's public school students at erieds.org

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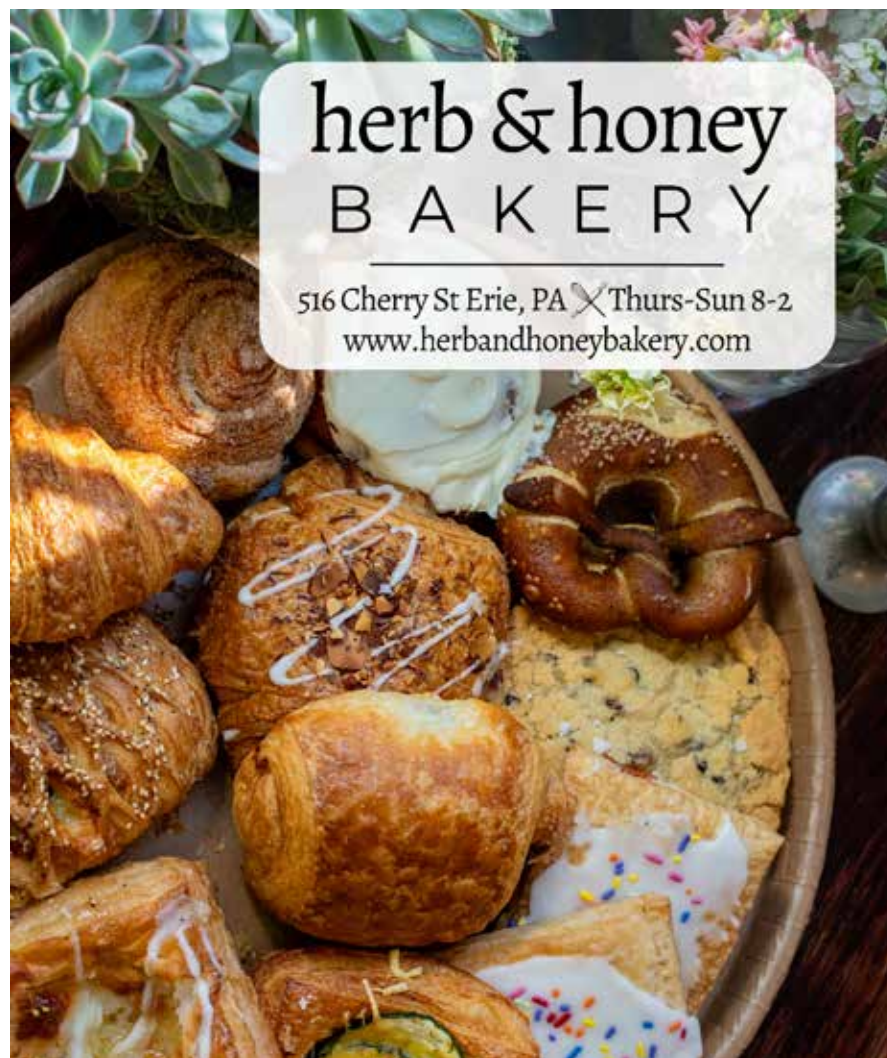
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NEIGHBORHOOD VOICES

Bird of the Month: Northern Flicker

A flamboyant woodpecker

By Mary Birdsong

Northern Flickers, a member of the woodpecker family, are a sight for sore eyes any time of year, but perhaps even more so in the winter when their distinctive plumage stands out against a snowy backdrop.

Northern Flickers are year-round residents in most of the lower 48 states, including our region – additional migrators pass through Erie in spring and fall going to and from their northern breeding range. The species is divided into two subspecies: the red-shafted, which occupies the western half of the states and the yellow-shafted, which resides in the eastern states, including Pennsylvania. The different “shafts” refers to the color of the area around the central support of the primary flight feathers.

Northern Flickers, a member of the woodpecker family, are year-round residents in most of the lower 48 states, including our region – additional migrators pass through Erie in spring and fall going to and from their northern breeding range.

Besides their vibrant wing feathers, their muted-brown bodies are decorated with stripes on the back and black spots on the white front. They sport a gray cap and a red crescent-shaped patch on their napes and a black bib patch on the upper chest. Another distinctive field mark is their white rump, which shows in flight and makes it easy to identify. In addition, the male has a black malar stripe extending back from the bill. This field mark is also called a moustache or whisker.

Unlike other woodpeckers which typically eat insects while perched on the sides of trees, flickers are ground feeders, with an appetite for ants, which is their main diet. They also eat other insects and even fruit in the winter. They will come to your suet feeder in the winter, too.

Flickers are relatively easy to find since they occur in a wide vari-



The Northern Flicker is an interestingly marked, highly colorful type of woodpecker that you’re just as likely to find pecking at the ground for ants in your backyard as you are to see in a cavity nest on Presque Isle.

ety of habitats, including urban areas. We often have them around our home and many are seen at Presque Isle and other natural habitats in the area, especially during migration. They are seen and heard especially in the spring when they’re gearing up for nesting.

They are cavity nesters and either excavate a new cavity (they are partial to Aspen) or reuse existing ones if it suits them, after some refurbishing. Once complete, the female will lay, on average, about seven eggs. Once the last egg is laid, it’s about 11 to 13 days until the chicks hatch. This seems like a short amount of time but, like many forest birds, flickers are altricial, meaning they are born with eyes closed, without feathers, and are entirely reliant on parents to feed them.

Flicker parents share incubation duties with the male doing more than the female. And males also spend more time tending to nestlings. So, like last month’s bird, the Spotted Sandpiper, dad does a lot of chick rearing.

These dashing woodpeckers always cheer me up when I see them. It is no surprise that in French they are named “Pic flamboyant.”

Mary Birdsong is the lead shorebird monitor for Erie Bird Observatory. Learn more at eriebirdobservatory.org. Mary can be reached at mbirdsong@eriereader.com

Edwina Tries... An Analog Day

Unplugging from technology to reconnect with everything else

By Edwina Capozziello

I was the kind of kid who enjoyed looking things up in the Encyclopedia Britannica – we didn’t have a set, but my great-aunt (Tia Star) did and I was obsessed with researching whatever struck my fancy. I would routinely look up a “word of the day” in our battered household dictionary. I loved quick bits of information. Call it Gemini spirit, plucky disposition, or undiagnosed ADHD, but I still love learning a little bit about a lot of things. Modern technology makes that almost too easy.

When cellphones became more commonplace, I didn’t care about it much. I got the cheapest plan, traded up from a beeper to a Nokia, and threw it in the bottom of my purse. For me, everything really changed with the iPhone. First, I had an iPod Touch which felt like a tiny computer in my pocket (as long as I was in WiFi range). Eventually, I upgraded to the iPhone 3, then the 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, and presently 15. I am constantly connected, with answers to a billion questions at my fingertips, the ability to find out what the name of that actor is, listen to that song in my head, order something I want, and take amazing photos of me, the cats, my love, my lunch, that squirrel... all right now! Taking a day off from all of that

sounded like it might be tough but, in fact, it was pretty fantastic.

The night before my analog day, a Saturday, I let my loved ones know I would be unavailable for a day or two so they wouldn’t worry and my anxiety would be lessened, and I went ahead and kickstarted early. I turned off my phone, I turned off the streaming service I was watching, I went out and did some yard work, came inside, cleaned up, and mixed up a sourdough loaf, put on a Coltrane record, and cozied up with a real book. No phone = no audiobook. When I went to bed, I set up a watch next to me so I could check the time if needed to and fell asleep without the help of my Calm app rain sounds.

I slept in on Saturday and woke up feeling great. I went into the kitchen and found that my fiancé had gotten me a single-use camera, written me a sweet note, and even included some cash for an extra fun analog day. The day included a trip to Herb and Honey Bakery, the Open Market at LEAF, Glinodo Goat Fest, Francisco’s Mexican Taqueria, baking bread, and cozy downtime on the couch watching a DVD (not technically analog, but not dependent on an internet con-

nection either). Then, I wrapped it all up watching the Elle Taylor Band at Voodoo Brewing Co. downtown and eating nachos. I was so busy having fun, I really only thought about my phone when I wanted directions or to find out the name of an actor, a song, to see what time it was, etc.; it was easy to let those things go and enjoy the moment. I was blissfully unaware of things outside my immediate surroundings, and it made me feel very peaceful, very happy, and all around good.

You, dear reader, may have discovered the importance of disconnecting from technology long ago. I admittedly am sometimes late to the party – it took me years to finally watch *Game of Thrones* – but that’s a story for another day. I think one day of “disconnecting to reconnect” was short enough and novel enough to not be a real test of my borderline addiction to my phone/internet/streaming services. I probably should try a weekend or maybe a week. Perhaps that would be overcorrecting. But two things are certain: one, it was great to spend time with people in real life as opposed to seeing their status updates, and two, we have a lot of physical media in our

CONTRIBUTED



This month, Edwina tried unplugging – namely from internet-based forms of information, convenience, and entertainment – and found herself more plugged into real life through slower experiences like reading, baking, listening to records, and watching DVDs.

home, and I need to spend more time with it and less time with digitized versions on my phone. Maybe I’ll acquire an encyclopedia. Do they still make those? I’ll look it up.

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

Take Your Beer For A Walk: PorchFest 2026

The perfectly paired event for a walkable beer

By Jeff McCullor

SATURDAY, SEPT. 26

Friends, I welcome you to September. Summer officially ends this month, even though it may feel like it’s left us already with the return of school buses on our streets and that increasingly early sunset. But fear not – there are plenty of great things to get into this month, including one of my all-time favorite city events, PorchFest.

Born out of that silly global pandemic six years ago, PorchFest had us all getting up off our couches and walking or biking all over the West Bayfront neighborhood to watch actual honest-to-goodness live music happen for the first time since lock-

downs began months prior. The best part? The musicians were hosted on volunteer porches, hence the clever name, so you could watch and listen from a safe distance. Fast-forward six quick years and the event is still going strong this time with over 30 bands deployed throughout the neighborhood’s 843-acre footprint.

Two of the people responsible for pulling off this joyous occasion are Dave Tamulonis (40 Under 40 Class of 2022 and Erie Reader contributor) and Chuck Nelson. When asked about PorchFest origins Tamulonis says, “Chuck and I revived, updated, and expanded the Porchfest event that had been run by other West

Bayfront neighbors after a long hiatus during COVID, socially-distanced and spread out in yards watching artists on porches. The model popped up in several other cities before we tried it here in the West Bayfront neighborhoods, notably Tremont in Cleveland and in a couple Philadelphia neighborhoods. For me, it’s the ultimate way to experience Erie: it encourages walking, biking, or communal transit and forces you to explore neighborhoods, talk to people, eat local food, drink local beer, and watch all local artists perform.”

Honestly, if there is a more perfect event to pair with an open container walk, I can’t find it. This gig

seems custom-built for the lifestyle of this column, so I’m going to take you through a preview paired up with some beer-walking activity. Exact performance times were still being worked out at press time so you’ll have to check the Our West Bayfront socials or do some light Googling for performance precision. Ready? Let’s roll.

We will begin this month’s tour by popping a favorite beverage outside Herb and Honey at 516 Cherry St. where singer/songwriter Jesse Taylor Smith will be strumming his acoustic guitar. He’s a frequent flyer in the region, playing venues like Five and 20 Spirits and Brewing, The Skunk and



Take a walk with Jeff McCullor and his cup-o'-suds as he traverses a short, sneak preview of Our West Bayfront's 2026 PorchFest – a neighborhood-wide concert featuring bands of all genres performing on porches like this one throughout the West Bayfront on Saturday, Sept. 26.

Goat Tavern, and Seneca Allegany Casino. Herb and Honey will be cranking out the high-quality carbohydrates this day, too, so grab a snack to pair with your beer... to pair with the tunes. Cheers to you Jesse Taylor Smith!

Next let's head south along Cherry Street a couple blocks, turning right onto West Seventh Street, landing at 613 W. Seventh where you can watch the Erie supergroup (featured elsewhere in this issue), This American Song. Now we all love a local band with a brass section, so plop down your folding chair in the street (the

side of the street anyway for safety!) and check out a memorable performance, beer in-hand. Cheers to you, This American Song!

We'll now turn around to head east to 437 Seventh St., where the unique sounds of the Flagship Steel Band will pull you right into another quality porch performance. You'll notice a bunch of Hawaiian-style shirted musicians resonate some seriously Caribbean tunes straight toward you. Seriously, when was the last time you saw a steel band play in your neighborhood? Cheers to you, Flagship

Steel Band!

By now you're probably low on liquid in your container, so pop another if needed; we have two more stops to make. Let's head back north to West Sixth Street where we'll cross the street, turn left and head west, meandering our way to 716 N. Park Ave., where Slim and Red, a self-described two piece Indie Nerd Rock band from Corry will be performing. Cheers to you, Slim and Red!

After your Slim and Red experience, wander over to the middle of Gridley Park where Liberty Street bisects it. There you'll find "The Hub," where fixtures include the Our West Bayfront info and merch tent, beers from Erie Ale Works, and treats from The Water Ice Family. Perhaps more importantly, there are portable restrooms set up so you can make adequately-timed

pit stops on your neighborhood traversal. And if you prefer a lift to some of the performances, the EMTA trolley runs a PorchFest route centered at this spot. Cheers to you, hub vendors!

This is of course only a small snippet of what's available at PorchFest 2026, it's truly a choose-your-own adventure day so get on out and explore the O.W.B. neighborhood on your own terms. It's certainly a day befitting someone that loves to take their beer for a walk!

Noon to 6 p.m. // West Bayfront Neighborhoods // Free // Visit ourwest-bayfront.org for more info

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



Gem City Style with Bobby Pape

An interview with the executive director of the Erie Philharmonic

By Jessica Hunter

The night before Bobby Pape interviewed for the biggest job of his life, he bought a ticket to a hockey game. An Erie Otters versus London Knights playoff game, a beer in one hand and a Smith's hot dog in the other. He knew no one. Erie got smacked. He wasn't watching the score anyway – he was auditioning the city before it auditioned him. And then he saw someone climbing the stands in an Erie Philharmonic hoodie.

"I thought to myself, if this is the kind of community where people are showing their pride at the hockey game with their Phil gear, it's the kind of place I want to live. I didn't know I was going to take this job when I got here for the interviews," he told me. "I knew when I left, I was going to take

this job."

Here's what he signed up for, exactly: an orchestra that has been playing since 1913, making it one of the oldest professional orchestras in the country – now heading into a season stacked with anniversaries. Daniel Meyer's 20th as music director, the Junior Philharmonic's 80th, the Warner's 95th, and on the final symphonic program in May, a piece the Erie Phil commissioned and premiered 75 years ago, coming home. All of it was handed to a guy who unpacked his boxes last summer.

"The biggest nerve-wracking thing for me as a relatively new manager, having been here just over a year, is to not mess it up," he told me, and he wasn't entirely joking. So that's

the question I spent an hour circling: what do you do when a city hands you something this old, this loved – and this many candles on the cake at once?

To understand why he wanted the job at all, you have to start on another Great Lake. He grew up outside Rochester, basically right on Lake Ontario, in the town of Webster – near Xerox's production campus, with Kodak's Rochester plant down the road. "I grew up in a community where everybody's parents took a turn working for one of those factories," he said. "And then in the '90s, when I was young, they started getting laid off from those jobs, and I lived through a community learning where to find its post-industrial foot-

ing." Then he went to school in Buffalo and watched the same story play out again, this time with steel.

His career took a detour before bringing him back to it: the Buffalo Philharmonic, then years in Boston managing a contemporary music ensemble – "smaller and scrappier and experimental, and a lot of fun" – then the Albany Symphony, another post-industrial city on another waterway. Life pulled him back to Boston, and he realized something. "I want a community orchestra."

When COVID rearranged everyone's sense of what mattered, he and his wife went looking for a place to be part of instead of adjacent to. Which is how he ended up at that Otters game watching for a sign.

JESSICA HUNTER



Executive Director of the Erie Philharmonic Bobby Pape's journey to Erie was a circuitous one – having served orchestras in Buffalo, Boston, and Albany – before he found himself inspired by the strong community and historic significance of the Warner Theatre and the Erie Philharmonic.

One of Pape's most frequently fielded questions is "what instrument do you play?"

"I played the viola for two months in fourth grade," he said. "Before the first concert, the orchestra teacher and I mutually agreed I should go back to the chorus." He grew up singing in church, and he still has the hymnal, full of his own marginalia. His friends were all in bands, and he was the one working the cash box, selling posters. "When I got to college, I realized there was a place for someone who wanted to help make music happen, but not necessarily on stage," he said.

There's no origin-story symphony here. What he loves is the assembly – the whole thing coming together. Which is how we got to what Pape describes as the 7:35 feeling.

"It's that moment when the concert is just about to start, and I've gone on stage to make my announcements. The orchestra is tuning. The house is full. The lights are down. I'm usually standing in the back or just off stage, and I've done everything I can do." He paused. "The moment that everybody else starts working is the moment I stop working."

The Phil is the largest performing arts ensemble in northwest Pennsylvania

and, as he put it, "an army of educators." The subscription series at the Warner is the visible tip of the iceberg. Underneath are 150 kids in the Junior Philharmonic and nearly 100 more in its choruses, a 150-member community adult chorus, long-term residencies in Erie elementary schools, and a program that sends the concertmaster and soloists into high schools the week of a concert so those students can watch them play it in the hall.

I asked him: how does the Philharmonic reach the people who never buy a ticket? Is it the schools, the Junior Phil, the free outdoor shows? "The answer is yes," he said, smiling. "It's all of those. If I had one goal, it would be that the Erie Philharmonic is sort of everywhere all the time." That ethos was here before he was, he's careful to note, "I'm just here to amplify it." In September alone, the brass quintet plays the Perry Monument rededication, a 9/11 ceremony, the Spirit of Erie dinner, and the Hagen History Center's gala.

"There's a lot of kids who will play their instruments for life," he said, "but there's also a lot of kids like me who will play viola for two months, but fall in love for a lifetime."

Then there's the season itself – the

first he's had a hand in shaping, and the one Meyer's two decades here have been building toward. Pape gives Meyer the credit for the programming. "There are pieces that other cities our size, their orchestras could not do, because they don't have the level of talent and skill that we have," he said. "And we like to show that off."

The end of the season is where he gets animated on the pops side, a *Best of Broadway* revue in April built almost entirely out of local singers – dozens of audition tapes have come in from the Playhouse, PACA, the Phil's own chorus. "How could you go wrong with that?"

Then May 1, the one he really wants you to know about. Tchaikovsky's Fourth featuring cellist Sterling Elliott – a Sphinx Organization award winner Pape has wanted to work with for years – playing the Saint-Saëns First. They're working on getting Elliott into schools while he's here, so it isn't only a Saturday night. The program opens with a piece called *Moby Dick*, by composer Peter Mennin, who was born in Erie and went on to run the Juilliard School. The Erie Philharmonic commissioned it and premiered it in October of 1952. Seventy-five years

later, they're playing it again, in the same city, for the grandchildren of those who heard it first.

"Anytime we can celebrate the artistic skill and diversity and breadth of our community and some history, all at the same time," he said, "who could ask for anything more than that?"

The room it all happens in is celebrating, too. The Warner Theatre turns 95 this year: "Quite simply, the Warner Theatre is our cathedral to the arts."

He's worked in cities where a hall that age was left to fall apart, and he's specific about what the restoration got right – Erie Events built an orchestra shell where the musicians can actually hear each other across the stage, which is not a given. "The respect for the history and the build for the future were maintained hand in hand," he said. Then, grinning, "I'm also delighted that we're not the ones who have to maintain it." He likes that the Phil shares a landlord with the Otters and the SeaWolves. This is, after all, a man who decided to move here at a hockey game.

He told me the funniest thing about his first year has been how many people pulled him aside to say: "Let me know if you need anything. Erie's a hard town to crack." But, "more people have said that than anyone who has made it hard," he said.

"You see businesses choosing to be in Erie instead of leaving, because they know that this is a place they want to grow." He wants to be shoulder to shoulder with that – as somebody who bought a house in the city of Erie, and as somebody doing his work here. Which might be the real answer to the not-messing-it-up question: the anniversaries take care of themselves when the new guy is the one wearing the hoodie now.

The Erie Philharmonic's 2026-27 season opens Sept. 26 and 27 with The Music of Elton John Starring Michael Cavanaugh, at the Warner Theatre (811 State St.). Individual tickets, full season passes, and information about the Junior Philharmonic and community chorus are available at eriephil.org.

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

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A Lesson in Choosing from the Nation's Former Mom-in-Chief

Michelle Obama comes to Erie on Oct. 12th for a conversation at the Erie Insurance Arena

By Chloe Forbes

As Barack Obama placed his hand on the Bible on a near-freezing day in 2009, my 10-year-old eyes were not fixed on him but on the young girl in the blue coat to his right – Malia. While I understood this was an important moment, I became more attentive to what the young girls were doing, and I wasn't the only one.

From the moment that they essentially became American royalty, Michelle Obama was not willing to hand her children over to the Secret Service and nannies. Instead, she called herself Mom-in-Chief to signify her commitment to her children above all else, what she considers her "greatest accomplishment."

Her commitment to family soon spread as she used her platform to support other families and children across the nation. But before I ever learned the names of her national initiatives, I learned that same lesson closer to home.

A handful of months after that chilly January day, Erie offered a warm welcome to R&B powerhouse Mary J. Blige. I was enamored by the star power of Blige, who traveled to Erie to help the ABC show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* rebuild the home of Clara Ward. Ward's eastside home was literally crumbling around her as she focused her time and energy on helping children through her Youth Development Center, aiding children and families while battling her own illnesses and struggling to pay her bills.

I didn't know Ward's name before that, but she became my first real lesson in the quiet power of Black women who hold up everyone around them. Over the next eight years, I would learn that lesson many times over.

In 2010, Michelle launched Let's Move!, an initiative to help end childhood obesity, resulting in healthier school lunch standards via the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act and planting a White House Kitchen Garden. In 2011, she joined Jill Biden, Ed.D., in supporting military families in employment and wellness through the Joining Forces project. By 2014, she created Reach Higher, inspiring students to pursue higher education,

CONTRIBUTED



Michelle Obama, former First Lady, author, and icon, will appear in Erie on Oct. 12 for "A Moderated Conversation with Michelle Obama," part of the Jefferson Educational Society's Global Summit XVIII at the Erie Insurance Arena.

and in 2015, Let Girls Learn expanded access to education for adolescent girls globally.

It was clear she wanted to make a path for girls, especially Black girls, to dream big and reach those dreams – a journey she personally navigated.

Michelle, her older brother Craig, and her parents lived in a small upstairs apartment on South Euclid Avenue in Chicago, which they rented from her great-aunt Robbie and great-uncle Terry, who lived downstairs. Space was very tight, and their grandfather eventually built a wooden partition in their bedroom to give Michelle and Craig the feeling of having their own private spaces.

Robbie taught piano downstairs, and Michelle began learning when she was just 4. She didn't see eye-to-eye with Robbie, but she practiced over and over before her first formal piano recital and felt she was ready.

"As much as I found Robbie to be snippy and inflexible, I'd also internalized her devotion to rigor," Michelle wrote in her 2018 bestselling memoir *Becoming*. "I knew my song so well I hardly had to think about it. I just had

to start moving my hands."

But there was one problem: she was sitting at a perfect piano. She was used to sitting in the "squat little music room," at a piano with "a honky-tonk patchwork of yellowed keys" and a conveniently placed chip on the middle C key, so she always knew where to place her hands. "Now suddenly, I was aware of people watching me from their chairs as I stared hard at the high gloss of the piano keys, finding nothing there but sameness," she writes. "I had no clue where to put my hands."

She searched the audience looking for her mother's face but instead found Robbie, coming to her aid. Up until that point, she saw Robbie as an enemy, but in that moment, she was an angel, perhaps knowing that Michelle was, for the first time in her life, coming face to face with the disparities of the world.

I cannot say it's a disparity that I experienced, and neither did my family before me. What I did experience was the benefit of Michelle facing those disparities head-on.

After graduating from high school,

she attended Princeton University, then Harvard Law School.

Immediately after graduating from Harvard, she began working at the law firm Sidley Austin LLP, where she met Barack. The two fell in love and married not far from where she grew up, and they stayed on the South Side to raise their two daughters, Malia and Sasha.

The family's ascent to the White House proved that you don't have to look a certain way, act a certain way, make a lot of money, or belong to a certain faith group to matter. She made her position as First Lady feel accessible to others, opening the White House to diverse groups, students, and community members, and she appeared on daytime talk shows and popular media outlets to connect with everyday citizens on a personal level. That's something she continues to do even now. On Oct. 12, Erie will get an even closer look at her as the Jefferson Educational Society hosts "A Moderated Conversation with Michelle Obama" at the Erie Insurance Arena for Global Summit XVIII.

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the small team at the Jefferson, and I have my own responsibilities to make the Summit possible alongside my incredible coworkers, but I did not choose who was invited. Last year, after President Obama's Global Summit appearance, I did hear the whispers of people asking, "How will they top this?" and "What will they do next?"

So when I learned that the First Lady had accepted the invitation, pride swelled within me, because although Barack's legacy is largely defined by his presidency and political achievements, Michelle's is cultural. While her husband was commander-in-chief, she was chief cultural commander, demanding equity, empathy, fairness, and inclusion.

She has continued to share that sentiment even after leaving the White House.

In 2018, she shared how those values became so important to her when she published her memoir, *Becoming* – a candid look at her life as a wife, mother, Black woman, and First Lady that spent over 130 weeks on the New York Times Bestsellers list and earned her a Grammy. In 2022, she followed it with *The Light We Carry*, offering practical tools for navigating uncertain times. She's backed that storytelling with action. Through the Girls Opportunity Alliance, she supports girls' education worldwide; through When We All Vote, she's helped register voters by the millions; and through the Partnership for a Healthier America, she's helped curb food insecurity across the country. In 2018, she and Barack co-founded Higher Ground Productions, extending her "when they go low, we go high" ethos into storytelling that

bridges cultural divides and elevates underrepresented voices.

Michelle continues that commentary on her podcast *IMO* with her brother Craig. The two host famous guests and answer listener-submitted questions, advising on personal dilemmas, relationships, parenting, and careers.

During a live recording of that podcast at SXSW London in June 2025, Michelle explained that in the new chapter of her life post-White House and as her children are grown up, she's focused more on herself and letting those of us coming after her flourish.

to post-White House life, revealing the team and thinking behind some of her most iconic looks. She's spoken candidly about the racialized and gendered scrutiny she faced over her clothes and her body, and about her choice, in recent years, to reclaim that image on her own terms – favoring designers of color who'd never dressed a First Lady before, and swapping the chemically straightened hair of her early White House years for the natural, protective braided styles she wears now.

This new chapter is also fitting as it brought her back to where her story

ly, as a community hub rather than a monument – a place designed around the idea that ordinary citizens, not just presidents, have the power to enact change.

Barack has said he doesn't want the Center to be an exercise in nostalgia that "lets us off the hook" when looking to the future. Instead, he wants visitors to walk away thinking, "that was possible, which means I can do that."

In a speech that moved her husband to tears, Michelle returned to that same idea of choice. She named the moment plainly: "anxious and divisive times," things feeling "upside down," fact and fiction blurring together. The woman married to the "Hope Guy" made sure that people know hope, like nostalgia, is not just a feeling.

"Hope is a choice," she said. "Whether or not we use our voices to speak up is a choice. Voting is a choice. Being a decent human being is a choice. Believing that we still hold the power to build a country that reflects us all is a choice."

As Mom-in-Chief, memoirist, and advocate, she's made the same case again and again: the future isn't handed to us. It's built, deliberately, by the people willing to do the work. So when Michelle Obama takes the stage in Erie on Oct. 12, the real question isn't how we topped last year's visit – it's what we'll choose to take from this one.

Monday, Oct. 12 // 6 p.m. // Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. // For info or virtual tickets, visit: jeserie.org.

Chloe Forbes is the assistant director of publications at JES, and a contributing writer at the Erie Reader. Reach her at chloeforbes14@gmail.com.

"Hope is a choice. Whether or not we use our voices to speak up is a choice. Voting is a choice. Being a decent human being is a choice. Believing that we still hold the power to build a country that reflects us all is a choice."
– Former First Lady Michelle Obama

"The choices I make now are going to be for me – not for my husband, my kids, the country, the world," she said. "At some point, it's important for our generation to step out of the way and be prepared to step out of the way so that the next generation can really sit in these seats."

The same idea of choosing what serves her now and capitalizing on her authenticity provides some insight into what she might talk about when she comes to Erie in October.

Namely, her newest book *The Look*, published in November 2025, is a 200-photograph collection that traces her style evolution from First Lady

started. In June, Michelle and Barack opened the Obama Presidential Center, a 19-acre campus in Chicago's Jackson Park – steps from the South Side neighborhood where she grew up learning piano from her great-aunt Robbie. The \$850 million campus includes interactive exhibits spanning the nation's founding through the Civil Rights Movement and Obama's 2008 election, a full-scale replica of the Oval Office, a gallery devoted to Michelle's most iconic looks, a fruit and vegetable garden, an athletic center, and a new branch of the Chicago Public Library complete with a President's Reading Room. It was built, deliberate-

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Shelf Life: The Stories of Four Local Physical Media Collectors

The analog artifacts of books, games, comics, and records

By Larry Wheaton

The modern world offers many ways to absorb media with the touch of a screen, giving access to ideas and art to people who may not have been exposed to them otherwise. Someone could easily read Hemingway on the same day as listening to Beethoven or Billie Eilish, while ending the day playing a video game featuring their favorite comic book character without having to own anything more than a phone or television. However, there is something about owning a piece of what you love, being able to physically touch it, and look at what you love. We spoke with four people who told us why it's so important to keep those things close by and why it's great to be able to revisit what makes you happy time and time again.

Polaroid photos taken by Jessica Hunter

Vicky Wittuck, book collector



Book collector Vicky Wittuck started her collection 27 years ago when she joined a book club with seven other women, aptly titled "Seven Novel Friends." Over time she has amassed around 800 books in her collection and is in a total of five book clubs, including one run by a 14-year-old and his mother, an online club with readers from all over the world, the Erie Reader Book Club, and (her latest addition) at Mercy Hilltop Center for Seniors. Wittuck says she reads about 80 to 100 books a year, but that still isn't enough for her. "I am almost 70 years old and it is sad I know I will never live long enough to read all the books I want to read." She says that each year she focuses on a different genre – last year she concentrated on banned books and this year she is reading classics. Vicky feels there is something special about having a physical piece of literature in your hands. "I love to hold and read a book.

It is like a piece of art on a page. Books always provide you a choice – that is why I collect so many different types of books."

She is an eclectic reader who fell in love with the written word at a young age. When she was young some of the first books she collected were the juvenile mystery collections by Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys, along with anything Winnie the Pooh. These days her collection spans many different genres and are kept throughout her house on various "stacks" and shelves, including a shelf of her favorite books that she hopes to save for her children and grandchildren to enjoy and read someday. "I always tell my kids and grandkids that reading makes you smart and wise. I do have a small library at my house for my 8-year-old granddaughter Jaelyn." She rarely buys brand-new books and prefers to purchase them used from Werner Books, but will go to any book sale she becomes aware of. Outside of books, she has also managed to amass a number of Christmas ornaments, specifically Santas and angels.

Joe Czarnecki, retro video game collector

From the arcade to your living room, video games have had a relatively short history compared to other forms of entertainment – however, they have become ubiquitous. In the fast paced world of first-person gaming, collector Joe Czarnecki has made his home a shrine to old-school gaming consoles. Growing up in the '90s, Czarnecki started with a Sega Genesis, then delved into the world of PlayStation games, and today he has collected about 17 consoles, 250 games, a dozen peripherals, and some strategy guides. "Growing up I remember the OG Nintendo and Game Boy games, then I really took to the Sega Genesis probably when I was like 7 or 8 years old because of its edgier, more mature games. I thought *Mortal Kombat* was the coolest game ever when it came out," says Czarnecki. Gaming isn't something that he feels is an isolated practice. "I enjoy the memories and physically owning something that can be shared with others, plus the couch co-op gaming experience that comes with two players or more."

For Czarnecki, retro games are more than just nostalgia – it's a passion and a way to preserve what he holds dear. As the market changes how people experience gaming with digital ownership, Czarnecki believes that the only way to own something is to have a physical copy, something that you are able to hold, lend, resell, or even stream online as a content creator due to fair use. "Sony announced that the PS6 is not going to have any physical games. *GTA6* will also not be physical – these models of business are anti-consumer, offering essentially a rental license. You can say it has less of a carbon footprint, but the data centers used to stream your games will be worse," said Czarnecki. "The future of consoles



in gaming is for them to be an overpriced streaming box that has no use when the servers eventually go offline – meaning the only way to continue to use a product you bought and are supposed to 'own' is to modify it."

Cole Schenley, comic book collector

Long before Marvel became a household name and conventions ruled the entertainment world Cole Schenley began collecting comic books with the help of his father, who was a co-owner of a collectibles business in New Jersey, selling sports cards and comics. "As the story goes, a babysitter let me play with comics (I would have been a year or so old at this point) and I ripped the comics up." Right around 10 years old, Schenley began buying Archie Comics and was given a bag of superhero comics – that gift led him to characters like Batman, Superman, and Spider-Man. He continued to casually shop at local comic book stores, eventually working locally at Books Galore for many years – but Schenley didn't become a serious collector until he was in college in the early 2000s. Schenley's love of comics was sparked both by his love of the written word and for the art, "I grew up being a voracious reader, and I've always loved art in its myriad of forms, whether that was drawings, paintings, photography, or film." He continues, "The mix of words and pictures captivated me from a young age, and as I grew older I became fascinated with the alchemy that went into making and then reproducing the pages of a comic book."

Schenley is your friendly neighborhood comic collector and over the years he has managed to accumulate about 6,000 individual comics, along with a large book and graphic novel collection, storing his

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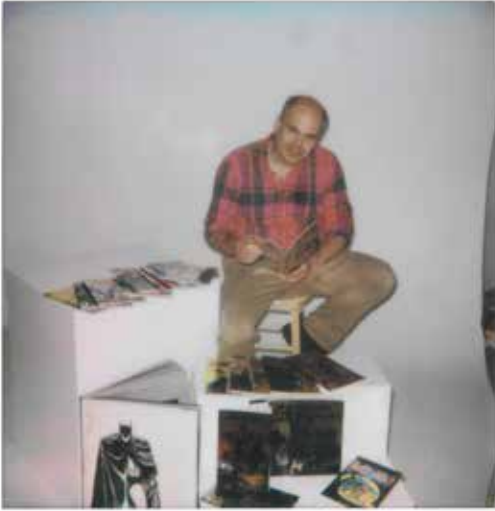
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Music's *Stranded* when she was in fifth grade. To this day the exact number of records in her collection is unknown, but Sullivan says that it's definitely larger than your average collection. As with every collector, the hint at what's missing can have an addictive aspect to it. "I started, back in the early '80s, a ritual of going to the mall every weekend to play arcade games and buy a record. It was always so exciting to bring it home and listen to it for the first time. I have vivid recollections of when and where I acquired almost every album in my collection," says Sullivan. Like many record collectors she started as a completist, but has since downsized and feels she no longer needs nor wants to own albums. For posterity's sake, she only keeps those things she truly enjoys or has some sort of "historical" significance to her, stating, "These days I think about the possibility of my collection being absorbed by my daughters." The passion for record collecting has influenced



comics largely in comic book boxes or on shelves. Schenley explains why he believes people collect comics: "People have a variety of reasons for collecting. Some do it in hopes of eventually making money on the collectibility aspect of the hobby, some people enjoy following the adventures of particular characters, and some people obsess over particular artists' styles and want to see their latest work."

Melissa Sullivan, record collector

Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously wrote: "Without music, life would be a mistake," in his 1889 book *Twilight of the Idols*. This quote rings true for all music fans and especially to local record collector Melissa Sullivan, who has been collecting records since she was 5 years old when she received hand-me-down copies of Beatles records from her father to add to her children's albums she played on a Mickey Mouse suitcase record player. The floodgates opened and she was then gifted records like David Bowie's *ChangesOneBowie* and The Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* as Christmas presents. The first record she bought with her own money was Roxy

What drives people to collect physical things is part nostalgia and part preservation – without collectors we wouldn't have a physical catalog, a wealth of knowledge and art, that can be passed down to generations.

Sullivan's life in so many ways: her first job was at Musicland in the mall when she was in high school in the late '80s, she worked in two different record stores when she moved to Chicago in the '90s and was cast as a bartender in the film *High Fidelity* about record store clerks in 2000. She continues to share her love of record collecting with some internet friends, "I currently belong to a small group of record collectors from all over the country and

overseas online. It started as strictly a buy/sell environment, but it has morphed into a community of friends."

What drives people to collect physical things is part nostalgia and part preservation – without collectors we wouldn't have a physical catalog, a wealth of knowledge and art, that can be passed down to generations. It's our passion, it's the thing we would dedicate most of our time to if we didn't have to work "regular" jobs to feed our collections. It's what we obsess about when we have a free moment in our heads, and what we turn to when we have a free moment in time.

Erie Reader contributing writer Larry Wheaton has been collecting records since he first bought Pearl Jam's Vs. in 1993. He has scoured countless thrift store bins, yard sales, and estate sales, stopping at record stores in every city he's visited and buying at least one memento from each of them, and acquiring a collection in the thousands with a life cycle that grows until space runs out, then it's time to downsize and release those once loved gems back into the wild. He can be reached at wheaton1138@gmail.com.



Bringing 1812 Into the 21st Century

A national museum on the shores of Lake Erie's bayfront

By Jonathan Burdick

One doesn't have to spend too much time in Erie before they will almost certainly begin seeing references to the War of 1812 – or, more specifically, the war's Battle of Lake Erie. The battle, fought on Sept. 10, 1813, took place off Put-in-Bay, Ohio after the fleet sailed from Erie's Presque Isle Bay where the ships were constructed. It resulted in a decisive victory for the United States against the British, described by the National Park Service as "one of the most resounding naval triumphs of the War of 1812."

"We have met the enemy," wrote Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry in his brief dispatch to Major General William Henry Harrison, "and they are ours."

Today, Erie homes and businesses display Oliver Hazard Perry's iconic "Don't Give Up the Ship" flags while Erieites themselves proudly sport it on t-shirts, hats, and tattoos. Waldameer Park and Water World has an entire multi-level water play structure that is Battle of Lake Erie-themed. A skip away from Dobbins Landing – named for Daniel Dobbins, the man who convinced Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton to build the ships off the shores of Erie – with its glorious views of the bay and city, there's the Flagship Niagara and Maritime Museum, managed by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC). There's the newly opened "Command and Courage: Oliver Hazard Perry" exhibit at the Hagen History Center, which recreates Perry's lower-deck private quarters and includes his sword, sextant, documents, artifacts, and a lock of his hair.

These connections have led some to believe that Erie is the perfect place for something else: a *national* museum dedicated to the War of 1812. As reported by Valerie Myers in the Erie Times-News in March 2026, one of its key supporters is Brad King, Ph.D., vice president of Lord Cultural Resources in Toronto.

In June 2026 Talk Erie host Joel Natalie interviewed King alongside journalist (and Erie native) Steve Scully to discuss the feasibility of such a "transformational" museum opening in Erie. The vision, they made clear,

is not to compete with any existing local museums, but to complement them in a location that is geographically central among the Great Lakes (not to mention the halfway point between Chicago and New York City).

What would make this museum different then? First of all, as previously stated, this would be a *national* museum. While there are many museums that reference the War of 1812 or are dedicated to an aspect of it, most are regional and do not encompass the entire war.

"There is no National War of 1812 museum in the United States," King told Natalie. "The story is told in bits and pieces ... It's a *big* story. And that's where the opportunity lies for Erie." He reiterated to Natalie and then again to Erie News Now in a separate interview, "[T]here's probably no place that's got a better claim to telling this whole story than here."

"We want to tell the totality of the story," added Scully, while King noted that there is the American perspective of the war, itself a vast story, but also the Indigenous, British, and Canadian perspectives all which deserve deeper exploration and emphasis.

A National War of 1812 Museum in Erie would be a long overdue addition to the public-facing history of the United States, an often overlooked war that some have referred to as a continuation of the American Revolution or the second War for Independence.

"We want to bring it to life and want people to experience it. That's the opportunity here," King said. He brings plenty of experience. After earning his Ph.D. in History from the University of Toronto, King has either led or contributed to more than 300 museum planning projects across numerous countries since joining Lord Cultural Resources in 2000. His expertise is specifically museum exhibition development and specializes in master

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Not much is more self-identifying for Erieites than Oliver Hazard Perry's now-ubiquitous phrase (and corresponding flag) "Don't Give Up the Ship." Erie is the top contender to host the site for an upcoming national museum dedicated to the War of 1812.

planning, collection analyses, business planning, and museum learning strategies. He is also co-editor of *The Manual of Museum Learning* from 2016 and published *New Directions for University Museums* in 2023.

While King and Scully remained somewhat coy as to potential locations that are being scouted, they did confirm that they *are* looking at potential sites. Simply put: it *has* to be on the waterfront. "[W]e are trying to include everyone," Scully assured Natalie, saying such a monumental task would have to be "community driven" to be successful, particularly because, down the line, a significant (but still uncertain) amount of money will have to be raised.

Historian Douglas Brinkley, one of the minds behind the \$420 million National World War II Museum in New Orleans, one of the biggest supporters of bringing such a museum to Erie, and a participant in events at the Hagen History Center and Jefferson Educational Society, has already been working on organizing significant support among potential donors. According to Erie Times-News,

he's also already discussed it with the Secretary of the Interior about it being part of the U.S. National Park Service.

All of this is, of course, still in the early stages – but if Erie is to some day be home to the National War of 1812 Museum, it will take widespread support. It will also be a long overdue addition to the public-facing history of the United States, an often overlooked war that some have referred to as a continuation of the American Revolution or the *second* War for Independence. The American Battlefield Trust has called the young nation's defeat of the British in the war as its "coming of age."

"The War of 1812 was the strangest war in American history," wrote Pulitzer Prize winning historian Gordon S. Wood in 2010, echoing historian Alan Taylor who said it "looms small in American memory."

Perhaps then, in the future, Erie can play a central role in changing that perception.

Jonathan Burdick runs the public history project Rust & Dirt. He can be reached at jburdick@eriereader.com



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Erie's Zine Scene: Past and Present

Why DIY self-publishing in real life has been, and always will be, a thing

By Erin Phillips

You never know what will become a formative moment.

Picture this: it's 1996 and I took an EMTA bus to the Millcreek Mall with my friend to walk around, exist outside of our houses and parents, and try to figure out what it means to be a semi-adult human being in the world. I wandered into the Record Den (one of multiple record stores in the mall at the time) and picked up a free copy of a newsprint zine called *R.T.R.* (i.e., *Road to Ruin*) from a stack piled on the floor and started to flip through it. I was rapt. It was crammed full of interviews with local punk and hardcore bands, show previews and schedules, multiple sections of dense script from contributing music writers, album reviews, and local ads showcasing the Erie music scene at the time. I was instantly hooked on the idea of free local newsprint, and I guess I never let it go.

R.T.R. was a DIY zine (which is basically a limited-run, self-published booklet or magazine made for personal interest or expression, not profit) conceived by, edited, published, and largely written by local historian, author, musician, archivist, and mega-music-fan Debbi Lyon through her production company Lyon Tamer Press. At the time of the zine's conception and production, Debbi was working at Record Country, an independent record store in Wesleyville in operation from 1978 to 2004, which facilitated many of her connections to the local music scene.

This paper was largely made before the internet was a major part of our daily lives and the layout has a columnar, cut-and-paste look to it that gives away its age and its DIY ethos. "I did a couple of issues of *So-So-Ciety* with Art Fridrich (a local punk and underground zine published in the Wesleyville area during the mid '90s) before he moved to Chicago. And we brainstormed that zine while sitting on the floor of John Vanco's place on Parade Street," Lyon recalls. "Then, in September of 1996, I started *R.T.R.* with \$500 that I had saved. I published nine issues in the first year with a lot of help from the metal, punk, and hardcore communities in north-west Pennsylvania."



R.T.R. was a DIY zine dedicated to covering Erie's local punk, hardcore, and metal music scene in the mid-'90s and was conceived and published by Debbi Lyon – who sourced contributions from local artists and musicians, wrote album reviews, promoted local and regional shows, and interviewed bands.

Print media runs through Lyon's veins and creating *R.T.R.* was a logical outcome of her life up to that point, "I was a fan of Trouser Press, Bomp, the Cleveland Scene, and the Chicago Reader. I was the editor of my middle and high school newspapers. I wrote freelance for the Erie Star, the Erie Times-News and *Showcase*, *Billboard*, *Guitar Player*, *Foundations*, and other industry and local music publications. I was in the habit of writing, listening to music, and playing guitar every day." She continues, "People would call and tell me about upcoming projects and invite me to shows. It was all about connecting in real life and making memories."

Additionally, while working at the record store, she made connections with record labels (like Victory, Revelation, Epitaph, Roadrunner, Century Media, etc.) who were eager to buy ads, which provided just enough income to get the zine printed and distributed.

Cover art for *R.T.R.* ranged from show-flyer type graphics to contributed custom illustrations from

local artists like Pat Mazzone, Jim Turowski, Tim Markin, Nate Gillies, Mike VanWinkle, Travis Sheldon, and Mark Welser. Regular contributors included, among many others, Mike Ski, Jon Miller, Melissa Hinman, Dan Rapela, Leslie Greenman, Dave Steele, Lynn Cummings, Ben Frazier, Doug Corey, and Devin Young.

R.T.R. went through a run of 15 papers before other local history interests called away Lyon's authorial attention (she published *Greetings from Wesleyville*, "a 484-page tome" in 2007, a second Wesleyville book in 2010, in addition to creating a blog called Old Time Erie). "I wish I had time to publish another issue of *R.T.R.*," Lyon shared. "Reading physical media is intentional, as opposed to doomscrolling."

From that day in 1996 forward, I picked up an *R.T.R.* every time I saw one. This zine introduced me to new bands, it informed me about all-ages shows and venues (I am eternally grateful to have learned about somewhere to go that wasn't the mall), it provided a sense of community to a

flailing adolescent looking for somewhere to belong, and it filled me with a sense of admiration for the deeply cool person who took the time to make this thing over and over again.

Fast forward 30 years from that day at the Millcreek Mall, and we find ourselves in an (often exhausting) digitized world – where the knee-jerk course of action to promote a record, show, event, or business, or to share our thoughts or creations, is to post about it on social media.

But just because that's the obvious way doesn't mean it's the only way.

There is something happening in Erie right now – call it a zine resurgence – but finding independently printed and published zines (or learning how to make your own) is not as niche as you might think.

Local artist and owner of Grounded Print and Paper Shop Ashley Pastore (40 Under 40 Class of 2022) is on the front lines of local zine production – in her art space that encourages collaboration and physical production of paper and prints, houses a Risograph



Local art space Grounded Print and Paper Shop hosts monthly classes teaching attendees how to use the Risograph printer (basically a screen printer inside of a copy machine) to make a collaborative art zine.

printer available for public use and multiple tenant studio artists who make zine and zine-adjacent products and teach zine-making classes.

At Grounded, a group of folks including PennWest Edinboro and Allegheny College art professor Doug Eberhardt, teaching artist, illustrator, and graphic designer Alex Strasser, and screenprinter and owner of Leadhead Screenprinting Chris Pace, is all, in one way or another, currently making zines and feels passionately about the artform as a form of self-expression.

In his class at PennWest Edinboro, Eberhardt and his students create a collaborative themed zine every semester – the most recent being the students' interpretation of the theme *Teeth*. With artwork ranging from prints to digital arts, poetry to painting – all of the images are eventually run through a Risograph printer for a final product that looks uniform despite its disparate media.

Eberhardt explains why having the physical zine at the end of a class is important: "I think a lot of college students are into seeing their work come into a physical space. Digital drawing is so popular – they all have iPads and are constantly on screens, creating, or sharing things with each other. But once they see their images coming into physical reality – through zines, Risograph printing, screenprinting, all print-made things in general – they're really excited and surprised at how satisfying it is."

Strasser and Pace give me a run-down of how their monthly zine-making class works in tandem with the Risograph printer at Grounded. The RISO brand printer was created in Japan in 1986, and it uses similar technology as silk-screenprinting – using

soy-based ink (three colors are available in the Risograph at Grounded) in a newsprint-type fashion. You can either place a physical image or object on the scanning bed (like a photocopy) or you can load it in through a computer program. Pace explains, "The machine uses a heat needle and it etches the image onto a thin rice paper screen that is draped over a drum. Then, when the drum spins inside the machine, it forces the ink out through the paper screen. It's kind of like screenprinting mixed with a Xerox machine."

"The Risograph printer is so awesome – it's a really efficient way to make colorful, beautiful zines. Before having access to the RISO printer, I made a lot of photocopied zines or outsourced them to a printer, but the machine is just so beautiful and it makes more of an elevated zine. It feels more like an art book," Eberhardt explains. "I was initially intimidated by the Risograph printer and maybe that's what is stopping some people from collaborating and doing this cool thing – so I would say if anybody is curious, it's not as hard to use as I thought and I think they should definitely take a class, try it, and I'll bet they'll really enjoy it."

Grounded Print Shop offers a monthly "Intro to Risograph" class led by Strasser in which attendees create a unique, collaborative Risograph-produced foldable zine featuring their own art or photographs. The next one is scheduled for **Monday, Sept. 28 at 5:30 p.m.** or folks can stop by Grounded Print Shop (located at 1902 Cherry St.) for their upcoming Makers Market corresponding with Gallery Night on **Friday, Sept. 18 from 5 to 10 p.m.** to check out the Risograph

printer, see some examples of zines made that way, or sign up for a class.

A more philosophical thought that arose during our conversation at Grounded Print Shop was the question of why someone would want to make a zine today – Pastore mused, "It is interesting to think about what the purpose of a zine used to be – like a way of sharing alternative information before you could just Google it. And so what is the appeal now, outside of the aesthetics of it? What's the real reason to make a zine?"

Those in attendance offered some theories. Eberhardt thought, "Zines were initially used as a tool to self-publish, to put your ideas into the world and share them. The thing that's shared with that idea today, regardless of the content, is that there's something gratifying about putting your stuff into a physical space."

Strasser concurs, "It feels more important once it's printed out – if it's a book, you now have it and you know where you put it or you can give it to somebody else and there's a better chance of them actually seeing it. You gave them the actual thing – it's more limited but more impactful. It feels lucky, like you found a treasure."

To get another answer to Pastore's question, I asked someone who is actively making a print zine today. Enter Bob Jensen, 40 Under 40 alum, former owner of Basement Transmissions, artist, musician, and all-around Renaissance man – who also happens to use a wheelchair – as he embarks on self-publishing a zine entitled *DISSED ABILITY*. For Jensen, making a zine felt like a way to use his art and his voice to say something that he felt needed to be said. "I decided to make a physical zine for several reasons, all of which begin with my disability." After working with others with disabilities at Voices for Independence for two years and witnessing their struggles, followed by a harrowing year of emotional decisions and losses, including aiding his father through his cancer diagnosis, treatment, and eventual passing, and then dealing with his own chronic pain and neuropathy, Jensen says, "I have come to realize the health care system is completely broken and that's when I started drawing comics that focus on disabilities issues." After being shuffled around from office to of-

fice, waiting months for appointments, "hours upon hours of my life gone to Muzak and on-hold robots with no accountability," he said he connected with others on social media who were experiencing similar frustrations with the health care industry. "I said: that's it. I'm going to make a zine to get people working together for change. I always loved seeing DIY zines because they just seemed to explode with creativity and ideas."

The first issue of *DISSED ABILITY* is slated for a Sept. 15 publication date and will include contributions from local writers and artists who all come to the project with their own experiences with disability. Included in the first issue will be: an article contributed by Noah Britton, who is best known as the subject of the 2016 Netflix documentary *Asperger's Are Us*, comics and graphics from Erie-based artist Eerie Eric Fargiorgio, an article titled "Throw Out the Line" about the seen and unseen aspects of disability contributed by Aaron Davis, a column from Kathryn Hicks called "Fashion Talk" which gives insight into shopping with unique body sizes and needs, poetry from the mother of autistic children, with more content in the pipeline.

Jensen adds, "It is a free zine to anyone with a disability and I am asking for a \$3 donation from anyone who may have the funds. I plan on handing them out at local events, as well as hand-delivering them to politicians locally, and eventually going to D.C. to do the same."

While Jensen uses the artform of a zine to attempt to make social change and to give those with disabilities a platform, others like Eberhardt and his wife Lauren Lowry have made zines for years as their own personal artistic experiments. "My wife and I have

📍 DID YOU KNOW?

The Erie County Library's Idea Lab at Blasco library is hosting a free "Make a Zine" class on Wednesday, Sept. 30 from 6 to 7 p.m. for folks ages 11 and up. They will provide all necessary supplies and have some examples to get your creativity flowing. This is a great way to get started in the hobby. No registration is necessary. Visit events.erialibrary.org for more info.

ERIE ERIC FARGIORGIO



The first issue of Erie's latest zine, a brainchild of Bob Jensen, *DISSED ABILITY*, will be available mid-September. The zine grew from Jensen's increasing frustration with America's health care system and helps to lift the voices of those with disabilities in our community.

been making zines under the name Jet Black Press since around 2010. We always liked zines – she's a librarian and I'm a printmaker, so zines were where a lot of our ideas could come together."

For Debbi Lyon back in the '90s it was all about bolstering the local music scene, connecting with people, and creating – often simply for the eventual memory of it all.

Paging through all those old *R.T.R.s* in preparation for this article was an incredible walk through a time and place that, if you were there, you would never forget anyways. Lyon just made sure of that.

R.T.R. wasn't just a slice of life from Erie's bygone music scene, it stands as a moment from a time when the slower form of print media was a primary way people shared their ideas and information. With articles like one penned by Ben Frazier listing the (hilariously scant) amount of indie music and record label websites that existed

in 1997 or a zine review section where Lyon herself listed and reviewed the multitudes of zines that were regularly in circulation at the time (like *Chumpire* out of Conneaut Lake, *Foe* out of Bethlehem, *War Paint* penned by Erie's own Mike Ski, or *True School* created by Digression's Bill Gehrlein), these publications recall a time when we were much more intentional with what we read and how we spent our time.

Lyon shared with me that she still has the layout for an unreleased *R.T.R.* issue in her archives. Anyone want to kick in a few bucks to help that treasure trove of '90s Erie nostalgia see the light of day, maybe printed on a Risograph this time around?

Erin Phillips is very grateful to have a pack-rat of a husband who saved all but three issues of R.T.R. to help inform this article. She's missing issues 4, 7, and 9 if anyone wants to help complete the set. She can be reached at erin@eriereader.com

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This American Song Moves Forward to *Play It in Reverse*

How the Erie band stayed active over 15 years, evolving into a collective art project

By Nick Warren

It was a cool summer evening when I met with This American Song – sitting on a front porch in Downtown Erie. The band served homemade salsa that we snacked on throughout the conversation. It’s that kind of laid-back welcoming feeling that distinguishes the band, which guitarist John Johnston described as a “group art project” more than anything else. This low-pressure vibe helps underscore how they’ve been able to stay together for over 15 years.

Prepped for the release of their latest album *Play It In Reverse*, the band looked back on how they have expanded and evolved past their teenage years of existence, reflecting on all the various forms of physical media they have intentionally created over the years. From the early collaboration between Jeff Phillips and John Johnston to the nine-member collective it is today, This American Song has grown into a creative project that’s consistently productive. Taking time between releases to write, record, and reframe the band, they’ve built a healthy discography at a steady pace. “We have always been a band that has put a lot of thought into creating physical media from our recorded materials. Our first record was pressed on vinyl and we hand-stamped and lettered 300 sleeves – far too many records – and we severely underestimated how time consuming it would be,” says Jeff Phillips, frontman and guitarist for the group.

The band consists of Phillips on guitar and vocals, Johnston on guitar, Larry Wheaton on trombone and percussion, Jesse Guerrein on trumpet, Marissa Litzenberg Tamulonis (40 Under 40 Class of 2023) on saxophone, Brent Knight on drums, Dave Tamulonis (40 Under 40 Class of 2022) on violin and keyboards, Michael Milk on bass, and McKenzie Sprague (40 Under 40 Class of 2025) on vocals.

This album found the band doing things a little differently. With more active singers and songwriters contributing to the total product, they have developed a familial quality – This American Song is free to share the spotlight from member to member. For sections of the new album,

CONTRIBUTED



Local rock-and-rollers This American Song are continuing a long legacy of producing physical media (including vinyl LPs, lathe-cut, 7-inches, CDs, and cassettes) as they recently wrapped up recording on their latest release *Play It In Reverse*, a record two years in the making, which will be pressed on jade green vinyl and is available for preorder now.

Phillips explained that “we basically had three acoustic guitars, and we just tracked them with live vocals and acoustic guitars,” noting that “it was way different than we’d ever recorded before. It took over two years to arrange and record this set of songs.”

Play It In Reverse is the first album created from beginning to end with the current nine-member lineup. Its recording process began in early 2024, with six tracks being laid down and a separate session of four newer songs recorded in the fall of 2025. The 10-song album is currently available for pre-order through the band’s Bandcamp site and will be released on jade green vinyl with cover art by Sprague. “We decided to press it on vinyl because we wanted to make sure that the physical product we create reflects the same amount of effort and attention as the music itself. Mac made a full sized watercolor painting that ended up becoming our album cover.” Johnston also speaks to the band’s choice to take the extra effort to press a vinyl record, “I grew up before the age of streaming services

– if you wanted to hear a band, you had to invest in their physical media. I fell in love with this process: tangible art that you could hold in your hand, while your ears and brain absorbed the music.”

Over time, songwriting has shifted from being handled primarily by Johnston to being shared among members of the band. The group has a standing practice date every Monday, but the complete band often isn’t present unless they’re preparing for a specific show. They often break into sectionals with their horn players, or smaller songwriting teams, to work out specific parts or structures. “We went from playing 100 percent John-written songs to now having several songwriters in the band,” explained Phillips. Dave Tamulonis explained that “everybody isn’t so possessive of their songs. Anybody who gave a song to the band kind of let the band do what they wanted to do with it and didn’t really direct. There was a lot of experimentation.”

With upwards of six different songwriters, they still have one recogniz-

able sound. “I think the band has not only evolved in sound, but I think you can tell through the songs that they have different feelings,” said Phillips. “I think it still blends together with how we all play. It doesn’t sound like different people’s songs,” Wheaton added.

Johnston’s basement doubles as the band’s rehearsal space and a small home studio, giving them the opportunity to record at their own pace without worrying about money or scheduling. “There’s not a lot of editing,” Johnston clarified. “I try to treat it like a tape.” The band often opts to record some tracks live in the studio. Access to the studio also gives them opportunities to revisit tracks months later with new ideas for harmonies or other layering. “There was no sense of urgency like there would be if you were recording somewhere like [local producer Brian] Gloskey’s, where you only have the studio for a certain amount of time,” said Dave Tamulonis.

One thing the band has learned is when not to play, choosing the shows they play with care, maintaining nec-

essary flexibility (due to so many members) and prioritizing shows that serve as fundraisers or benefits, like their upcoming show at Our West Bayfront's PorchFest on Sept. 26. "This group is a very values-based group as well," explained Marissa Litzenberg Tamulonis. "There's a lot of intentionality behind the shows that we're playing." She detailed how suggestions involving food donations or community support are greeted with

unanimous enthusiasm. "The art of recording music is all about capturing a song or set of songs at a specific moment in time with the intention and hope of making something timeless. So many artists or bands through the years never get the opportunity to record and release their music," Phillips explains. After they released their first vinyl record, *The Grey is Darker* in 2013, they went on to explore nearly every other

type of physical media on which to record music. "We released a trio of 7-inch records that were splits with friends (Matt Texter, Planet Claire, and C. Brown). The release show featured limited box sets that were handmade and numbered (34 total were produced). We released an EP (*Black Sunshine*, 2017), a full-length album (*People Of The Stars*, 2020), and a live set (*PACA LiVE!*, 2023) on CD. When we recorded another set of

songs in 2023, we made the decision to release them on cassette (*Connect the Dots*, 2023) specifically because it was one form of physical media that we hadn't yet produced."

Talking to them, it's clear how they've stayed together. They've done it by chasing creativity and opening things up, giving themselves the freedom and leeway to hear each other – figuratively and literally. They've survived for 15 years precisely because they don't treat the band like something that has to consume their lives. This American Song has become a comforting outlet for its members and no doubt will continue to be for years to come.

To pre-order This American Song's latest vinyl LP (some pre-order bundles include hand-printed shirts and risograph prints of the album artwork), visit their Bandcamp site: thisamericansong.bandcamp.com

Nick Warren's first event spotlight written for the Erie Reader was a This American Song record release show in 2015. They can be reached at nick@eriereader.com



The band has grown from the early musical imaginations of John Johnston and Jeff Phillips to now include nine members, including a full horn section, to become what Johnston refers to as "a group art project."

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EVENTS

Late Night at the Movies Premieres at The Movies at Meadville

Catch the no-budget local project in the very same place it was filmed

PREMIERING THURSDAY, SEPT. 3

Just imagine making a movie with your friends at the place you work. Imagine *Clerks* as a slasher set in a movie theater, and you'll come pretty darn close to the ethos of *Late Night at the Movies*. The debut feature film from Taylor Rhoades was shot entirely on location at his place of work, The Movies at Meadville.

If you're a film lover from Erie and have still not yet visited The Movies at Meadville — what are you waiting for? This theater has all of the charm you'd ever want, with loving tributes to cinema all around and beautifully maintained facilities throughout.

Audiences of *Late Night* will see those wondrous facilities bloodied and heavily strewn with popcorn, not to mention a truly demented scene featuring a hot dog.

Having worked at The Movies at Meadville for over 13 years, Rhoades has long been immersed in movie culture and previously filmed a YouTube series at the location, along with scenes from *Late Night* cast member Jacob Perrett's *Spine Chiller*. Rhoades was inspired by spending time at the theater when it was closed on Mondays during

the colder seasons. The empty building set the stage for what was to come.

"The fact that it got made in the first place is already everything to me," Rhoades detailed.

The movie stars Melody West as Kayleigh (who wasn't even supposed to be there that day). It also features Karlee Mayfield, Gideon Morley, Jarod Gianoni, Perrett, Rhoades, and Casey Notarianni. It's always good to write what you know, so it's perfectly befitting that this film chronicles a group of young people working at a small independent theater. With plenty of jokes and references directly ripped from their own experiences, the movie balances slice-of-life workplace observations with slice-of-face horror scenarios.

Making this film was a labor of love. Describing the budget as "non-existent," Rhoades noted that "a lot of the money came from our pockets." The crew pitched in for food, while some of the editing software was paid for through crowdfunding. Rhoades brought a camera, a mount-on mic, some lenses, a tripod, and a shoulder rig, refusing to rent anything. "I don't think the no budget holds it back in any way," Rhoades wagered, noting that "in

CONTRIBUTED



Late Night at the Movies was filmed and set in the movie theater where the debut filmmaker, Taylor Rhoades, works — the Movies at Meadville — and will premiere at that very theater in September.

fact, I think that's just the charm of it."

Many members of the film's cast and crew were also involved in Perrett's recent feature film, *Photo Negative*. The psychological horror feature will be screening at the 1020 Collective on Wednesday, Sept. 23.

"I knew I could make this movie with what we had, and we did, and I'm so proud of it," Rhoades explained. In addition to special streaming editions being released (including a VHS simulation and a black-and-white option), the film will be screening for at least a full week at The Movies at Meadville, with a special cast and crew Q&A on opening night. — Nick Warren

Running from Sept. 3 to Sept. 10 // 11155 Highline Drive, Meadville, PA // \$11, \$8 for matinees // For tickets and full showtimes, visit themoviesat.com

An Afternoon of Fantastical Delights

Third annual Gem City Renaissance Festival returns

SUNDAY, SEPT. 6

Hear ye, hear ye! The time has come for Livaelore Events' third annual Gem City Renaissance Festival in Frontier Park. Enjoy an afternoon of fantastical delights with a mixture of live entertainment, over 32 artisan vendors, food trucks, historic demonstrations, and more.

Although Ren Faires originated in the 1960s, today's social media exposure has made these events more accessible than ever. Characters like The Pickle Priest and Jack the Whipper draw hundreds of guests to the larger venues every year. Acknowledging that travel may not be viable for everyone, event organizer Britty Lea (40 Under 40 Class of 2025) launched the Gem City festival in 2024 with hopes of bringing that familiar sense of "enchantment"

all from the comfort of our community's backyard.

"There are so many moments throughout the day that bring a light to my heart," said Lea. "The joy of a child speaking with the fairy queen, the delighted looks of guests as our friend the Big Skeleton walks around, the passion of our friends at Steelhead Western Martial Arts as they showcase their weapons demonstrations, the audiences cheering for our entertainers — the list goes on and on."

In addition to crowd favorites, new faces and attractions pop up every year, drawing attendees from all over the tri-state area. In 2025, Lea noted over 1,500 people in attendance with an expected continued growth as we head into this year's event. "This is a great opportunity to wear a fun fantasy outfit, spend time with friends, and explore all that is tucked away in our

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Now proclaiming! Gem City Renaissance Fair is the best festival in the realm! No jest! Now in its third year, the local celebration of all things post-medieval will feature live entertainment, period food, vendors, and historic demonstrations.

little festival," said Lea.

Guests who have pre-registered are also given access to a variety of additional perks. Pay-what-you-can tickets will also be made available at the gate the day of the festival.

Rain or shine, all are guaranteed to have a magical time. — Cassandra Gripp

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. // Frontier Park, 1501 W. 6th St. // Pay-what-you-can // For tickets and info: gemcityrenaissancefestival.com



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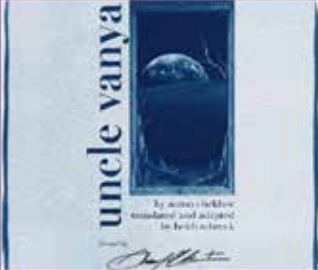
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UNCLE VANYA
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\$17 WALK-INS / \$2 CHILDREN
SAT., OCTOBER 3, 2026
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3:00 PM, 3:20 PM, 3:40 PM, 4:00 PM, 4:20 PM, 4:40 PM
SAT., OCTOBER 10, 2026
5:00 PM, 5:20 PM, 5:40 PM, 6:00 PM, 6:20 PM, 6:40 PM
7:00 PM, 7:20 PM, 7:40 PM, 8:00 PM, 8:20 PM, 8:40 PM

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Arts and Drafts Comes Pouring Back Again

70 visual artists and 12 bands make for a fabulous weekend

BEGINNING THURSDAY, SEPT. 10

Erie's favorite art event returns to the Brewerrie at Union Station for the second weekend of September. Combining craft beer, food, live music, and visual arts in one three-day event is a sure-fire way to keep people happy, and that is why this festival has been going strong since 2008.

Another reason for its longevity is the dedication of organizer Amanda Ferguson, who goes out of her way to give emerging artists a forum to show off their talent. This year's featured artist is Amy Gone (Gaughan), whose whimsical yet emotionally layered portraiture has become instantly recognizable for its distinctive style. Working primarily in oil paints and chalk pastels, Amy creates characters who inhabit familiar spaces, invit-

ing viewers to discover new emotional layers the longer they engage with each piece. Amy will be filling three large panels with her playful and melancholy creations.

Dozens of other new and returning artists will fill the historic rotunda with brilliant art available for purchase. Matt Boland is the musical organizer and has put together a terrific slate of entertainers for patrons to enjoy at the Trackside Beer Garden. There are four acts each night, so everyone can find an earworm to take home along with their masterpiece. Local band lineups include Coldsnap, Tommy Link, Eastern Recluse, Bootjack, and more.

Come out and support some local artists and musicians while you enjoy a finely crafted beer or cocktail. —Bryan Toy

CONTRIBUTED



The Brewerrie at Union Station will soon be taken over by local art for the annual Arts and Drafts celebration – spotlighting the work of featured artist Amy Gone alongside a packed slate of local music.

Exhibits open daily at noon, music from 6 to 10 p.m., Thursday through Saturday // Brewerrie at Union Station, 123 W. 14th St. // Free // For more info and full music schedule: facebook.com/artsanddraftsfestival

Come From Near or Far for *Come From Away* at the Erie Playhouse

Seemingly simple setpieces belie intricate staging

BEGINNING FRIDAY, SEPT. 11

The most deadly terrorist attack perpetrated on U.S. soil occurred on Sept. 11, 2001, and for a moment, Americans were united as we mourned all that we had lost. But the entire world felt the reverberations of that violence, including in a small, isolated Canadian town, in the province of Newfoundland. The Erie Playhouse is presenting *Come From Away*, the story of what happened when 7,000 airplane passengers were stranded in that northern town due to the attacks, and how the locals pulled together to come to their aid.

The musical, which had its first performance in 2013 before coming to Broadway in 2017, was nominated for seven Tony Awards, winning Best Direction of a Musical for Christopher Ashley. Richard Davis fills this role for the Playhouse's production, as well as serving as the artistic director for the organization, and he was emphatic in describing the difficulty of the play.

"*Come From Away* looks deceptively easy," he said. "It is not. The physical aspect of moving 20 chairs around the stage in various configurations and keeping track of which chair you

CONTRIBUTED



Director Richard Davis brings the Broadway hit *Come From Away* to the Erie Playhouse this month. Experience a musical built around the experiences of 9/11, specifically those felt in a small community in Newfoundland.

move, when, and where it goes is very challenging." He described how each actor plays multiple characters, too, each with their own personality (and in some cases, accent) – as a result, every performer is always "part of the action, the entire show." According to Davis, the entire cast has been hard at work to memorize, and perfect, all of these details.

Aside from the brilliant book and score (by Irene Sankoff and David Hein) the story and greater themes of

compassion and radical kindness are at the core of *Come From Away*, and Davis hopes those resonate with audiences. "Hopefully, it inspires people to step back and reflect on how they interact with others. A little kindness goes a long way." – Cara Suppa

Thursday, Friday, and Saturday shows at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday matinees: 2 p.m. // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. // \$15.88 - \$25.59, plus fees // For tickets and info: erieplayhouse.org

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EVENTS

September is PACA-ed with Great Shows

PACA puts on two very different but excellent shows

BEGINNING FRIDAY, SEPT. 11

September is set to be a great month for shows at PACA, with two vastly different offerings at different points in the month.

Starting Friday, Sept. 11, Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, as translated and adapted by Heidi Schreck for Broadway, will hit the PACA stage

M. HARRISON PHOTOGRAPHY



The Performing Artists Collective Alliance brings two theatrical offerings to its black box-style stage this month including (pictured) *Uncle Vanya*, an adapted Chekhov play directed by Shawn Clerkin.

and be directed by Shawn Clerkin. Originally published in 1897, Chekhov's play follows the lives of Sonia and her uncle Vanya, who have devoted their lives to managing the family farm in isolation. When her older, ailing father and his much younger wife come to the farm and move in, everything shifts and the order of their lives is flipped on its head. What follows is a tale of heated emotions and familial bonds put to the test, forcing the family to reckon not only with their own pasts, but the pasts they did not live.

Later in the month, beginning Thursday, Sept. 24, an entirely different genre of show will grace the stage. *The Irish... And How They Got That Way* will premiere for one week-end only at the space. The book was written by Frank McCourt, and the show was originally performed by the Irish Repertory Theatre in

1997 and features an eclectic range of Irish music ranging from the traditional "Danny Boy" to U2's "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." Directed for the PACA stage by Almi Clerkin, it is an irreverent musical history of Ireland through the turmoil of the 19th and 20th centuries as seen through McCourt's eyes. The production will feature the talents of Almitra and Shawn Clerkin, Michael Hayes, and Jean and Michael Malthaner. – Ally Kutz

Uncle Vanya runs Sept. 11-12 and 17-19 at 7:30 p.m., Sept. 13 at 2 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$24.74 // For tickets and info, visit: tickets.eriereader.com

The Irish... And How They Got That Way runs Sept. 24-26 at 7:30 p.m., Sept. 27 at 2 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$20 // For tickets and info, visit: tickets.eriereader.com

sacred pathways ART EXHIBIT

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Harmony and Blessings Concert Series

Ongoing music series offerings for September

BEGINNING SATURDAY, SEPT. 12

Stephen Trohoske, a talented musician in his own right, is always working hard to bring us the best live music here in Erie. The Harmony and Blessings Concert Series continues to be the outlet for that goal. This month

DWAYNE DOLPHIN



The Harmony and Blessings music series is bringing some stellar jazz acts to Erie in the coming months. Expect a unique performance from Sons of Fortune, featuring bassist and composer Dwayne Dolphin (pictured), followed up by the Stew Cutler Organ Trio later in the month.

there are two great shows lined up to bring you some of the best jazz you can find anywhere in the tri-state area.

First, on Saturday, Sept. 12, head on over to City Gallery for Sons of Fortune, featuring bassist and composer Dwayne Dolphin on piccolo bass (a standard bass strung with thin-gauge strings and tuned one full octave higher than standard tuning). Dolphin will be joined by local favorites Eric Brewer on guitar, Reggie Evans on drums, Preach Freedom on percussion, and Trohoske on bass guitar. Dolphin is an internationally renowned musician who has played with jazz greats including Stanley Turrentine, Fred Wesley, Wynton Marsalis, and Nathan Davis, among others.

Later in the month, on Sunday, Sept. 27, you can catch the Stew Cutler Organ Trio at Altered State Distillery, brought to you by both Trohoske and distillery co-owner Heather Maus. Blues guitarist and composer Cutler is back with his trio to promote their seventh studio album *The Blues From Another Angle*. A blues veter-

an, Cutler has worked with a who's who of amazing names over his decades-long career, including ZZ Hill, Percy Sledge, Wilson Pickett, Fontella Bass, Earl King, Jimmy Castor, David Sanborn, Bill Frisell, Meat Loaf, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Sweet Georgia Brown, and more.

These are two perfect opportunities to wrap up summer with a lovely night out experiencing some world class musicianship. Both venues are intimate and inviting places where you're sure to see some familiar faces. Trohoske himself says it best, "Thank you for your continued support and for helping us to keep raising the bar for arts and culture in our town." – Edwina Capozziello

Sons of Fortune with Dwayne Dolphin, Saturday, Sept. 12 // 7:30 to 10 p.m. // City Gallery, 1503 State St. // \$20 suggested donation, includes refreshments

Stew Cutler Organ Trio, Sunday, Sept. 27 // 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. // Altered State Distillery, 1535 W. 8th St. // Donations appreciated // For info: facebook.com/city-galleryerie

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Write the Epilogue to the Summer of Reading at Lake Erie Lit Fest

Celebrating storytelling in all forms at Frontier Park

SATURDAY, SEPT. 12

The Lake Erie Lit Fest is set to take over the Sixth Street side of Frontier Park. For one full day, the park will be filled with various forms of the written word – including kids' activities, giveaways, performances, readings, scavenger hunts, and more.

"When the Summer of Reading was formed, we were excited that the Lake Erie Lit Fest would be the culminating event. It has been great to see the community come together to celebrate literacy and the support from the mayor's office has been fantastic," says Kyle Churman, co-owner of Werner Books and Coffee.

Organized by the Erie Art Company with support from the City of Erie, Werner Books and Coffee, ECGRA, and other literacy-related community partners – this year's festival will include readings and performances from local writers, poets, and musicians, a dedicated kids' tent with crafts, games, and (of course) books, a free banned book giveaway, and a robust vendor market featuring books, food, crafts,

and more.

The heart of the festival is the authors' tent – dozens of local and regional authors will be present with their books for sale, to meet-and-greet, to sign copies, or answer questions. "Our authors' tent will have over 25 authors ranging from romance to children's authors. We also implemented an AI policy that puts the focus on human creativity and imagination," Churman shared. The Friends of the Erie County Library will also be on hand to accept any donations of gently used books to be used for their many fundraising book sales throughout the year.

This year, the festival will feature a new element called the Book Crawl – this activity takes your reading adventures outside the bounds of Frontier Park. The Book Crawl is a literary scavenger hunt throughout Erie County – pick up your bingo card at the festival and start filling it in right there at Frontier Park. Collect stamps from the Erie County Library Bookmobile, Thousand Lives Bookshop, the Werner Book Bus, Book Club on Main, and Pressed (right across the street), then



Celebrate the written word in all its forms at the annual Lake Erie Lit Fest as it takes over Frontier Park for a day of readings, performances, discussions, kids activities, vendors, author appearances, and more.

adventure to bookstores and libraries throughout the county to gather more stamps. Once you've got a bingo, you can drop your card off at participating libraries, book stores, or right at the Book Crawl table at the Lit Fest for a bookish raffle entry.

Churman is excited to continue to make Lake Erie Lit Fest a tradition in Erie: "Any opportunity to gather the community together to celebrate local authors, poets, and creators is a cause for celebration. We are excited to continue this yearly tradition in Frontier Park." – Erin Phillips

Noon to 5 p.m. // Frontier Park, 1501 W. 6th St. // Free // For more info: erielitfest.com

PA 250 Power and Purpose Wellness Event

Celebrate with Billy Blanks while supporting Bethany Outreach Center

SATURDAY, SEPT. 12

This event packs quite the punch. With Erie's own Billy Blanks, renowned creator of Tae Bo, the gifts of his niece Mabel Howard, and support for Bethany Outreach Center all rolled into one – this event is one for the books.



Join the folks from the Bethany Outreach Center as they welcome Billy Blanks to Erie for a wellness conference, which will feature speaking events and gym sessions to help promote living a healthy lifestyle.

Blanks will return to his hometown to lead an inspiring, transformative day of movement, motivation, and purpose on Sept. 12. The PA 250 Power and Purpose Wellness Conference will celebrate America's 250th anniversary while honoring a legacy of leadership, perseverance, and purpose as Blanks will lead workout sessions and share his story in hopes of inspiring Erie to embrace healthier and more empowered lifestyles.

There are multiple sessions and tickets available to meet everyone's needs – lifelong Tae Bo fans, coaches and community advocates, or those just taking the first step on their wellness journey. Howard, executive director of Bethany Outreach Center, said, "It is a great honor to welcome my Uncle Billy Blanks back to Erie for this historic event. PA 250 Power and Purpose is a celebration of our city, our health, and our shared commitment to lifting one another up. Together, we will move with purpose, live with purpose, and give with purpose. This is a move-

ment of faith."

All proceeds from the event will directly support Bethany Outreach Center's mission to fight hunger by providing nutritious meals and compassionate care to individuals and families throughout the Erie community.

The event was carefully crafted by Howard and Blanks and received backing from ECGRA. Howard said planning and leading the event has brought her great joy, "Because of my close relationship with the honoree, I have an opportunity to shape this event in a way in which he would approve. That has been a wonderful experience and I will not take it for granted." – Gretchen Gallagher Durney

Session One at 8 a.m., Session Two at 9 a.m., Session Three at 11 a.m. // First two workout sessions at Ascend Climbing Gym (426 State St.), final workout session and community celebration at St. John's Lutheran Church Gymnasium (2216 Peach St.) // \$25 and up // For more information and to purchase tickets: portal.eventio.ai



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EVENTS

ComiCon Erie 2026: A Flagship Fan's Guide

Celebrating nine years at the Bayfront Convention Center

BEGINNING FRIDAY SEPT. 18

ComiCon Erie returns to the Bayfront Convention Center in September, marking its ninth year as the Flagship City's celebration of fandom and pop culture. From John Tottleben's iconic inking on Stephen Bissette and Alan Moore's *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* to the contemporary work of local artists – comic book art has a rich history in Erie. In the same way Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster looked to their Cleveland roots on the shores of Lake Erie to help shape their vision of Superman's Metropolis – con attendees can look up, up, and away to Presque Isle bay and ComiCon Erie for inspiration.

"I feel like we have really taken the last few years to make this its own standalone con," Ali DeSanti, trade-show manager for Erie Events, described. "Our con is a good size for Erie. We're not as large as San Diego Comic Con or SteelCon, but we still offer a great atmosphere for people to enjoy."

This year's scheduled slate of celebrity guests will be available for both autographs and photo ops. Guests are encouraged to arrive 15 minutes ahead of their scheduled time, as ComiCon Erie's official Celebrity Photo Op Group will take the photo with a professional studio backdrop and print it on-site.

DeSanti discussed the excitement for new celebrity guests while also balancing expectations. "Going from where we started year one to this year, we're just growing slowly. It's a budgetary challenge to bring in bigger and bigger guests, but sometimes we

take chances."

Creature actor Doug Jones serves as this year's headliner, who is well known for his numerous collaborations with Oscar-winning director Guillermo Del Toro. "You may not notice him if he's just in his regular face. But he's the man behind the mask, and I know that there are a lot of people who are excited to see him. I think he's one of our bigger guests that we've had over all of our years." Jones is also known for his roles in *Hellboy*, *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer*, *What We Do in the Shadows*, and *Star Trek: Discovery*.

Additional celebrity appearances include Olivia Olson, voice actor and singer-songwriter, known for her roles as Vanessa Doofenshmirtz in *Phineas and Ferb* and Marceline the Vampire Queen in *Adventure Time*. Additionally, expect appearances from Sean CW Johnson, Misty Rosas, Chester Rushing, Selwyn Ward, Rena Owen, Michelan Sisti, and Dave Sheridan.

It wouldn't be ComiCon without cosplay and Erie's cosplay contest is divided into two competitions. The adult competition for ages 16+ runs on Saturday, Sept. 19 and the kids competition for ages 3-15 runs on Sunday, Sept. 20. Judging for the two competitions is based on presentation, craftsmanship, originality, and creativity. The cosplay guests for this year include Monster Lab Cosplay, Western New York (WNY) Guardians, Icons Unlimited, Maiacat Cosplay, the 501st Legion, The Dwight Knight, Erie Ghostbusters, and Big League Pro.

Additionally expect local artists, vendors, and authors across a va-



Join comic book enthusiasts, celebrities, vendors, cosplay fanatics, and LEGO builders for the annual Erie ComiCon at the Bayfront Convention Center.

riety of genres and artistic styles to be selling their work within the convention center. Eerie Horror Fest, Whitethorn Games, Anderson Toys, Andora's Bubble Tea Shop, Flagship City Games, Erie Distillery, Gold Star Anime, and IronStone Meadery will all have booths. The complete list of artists and authors, along with the convention floor plan, can be found on the ComiCon Erie website.

This year also marks a bittersweet experience for many artists and attendees, as it is the first ComiCon Erie without community mainstay Books Galore, a local comic and used book store that recently closed after 43 years. "We were definitely sad to see

"I feel like we have really taken the last few years to make this its own standalone con. Our con is a good size for Erie. We're not as large as San Diego Comic Con or SteelCon, but we still offer a great atmosphere for people to enjoy." – Ali DeSanti, tradeshow manager for Erie Events

them go," DeSanti said. Free-to-play arcade cabinets and consoles from Next Level Gaming, along with tabletop gaming sessions from In The Zone Gaming, are also featured attractions. Brick Erie returns this year in collaboration with the con as the go-to attraction for Erie-based Lego fans of all ages, bringing regional fans together to share their creativity and practical knowledge. Hundreds of one-of-a-kind builds will be on display, showcasing the work of Lego User Groups from across the country, including Pittsburgh and Buffalo. Families can expect educational and fun activities, including a play area, scavenger hunt, building bracelets, and stepping onto pieces in a "brick walk." – Thomas Taylor

Friday from 2 to 7 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. // Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier // \$20 Friday or Sunday, \$25 Saturday, \$50 Geekender pass, \$85 VIP pass // For tickets and info: eriepromotions.com

Erie Reader Book Club: September 2026

A Visit from the Goon Squad by Jennifer Egan

SUNDAY, SEPT. 27

The Erie Reader Book Club will be reading and discussing *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan in conjunction with the Back to (Old) School issue of the Reader.

Each September, the Reader usually features back to school as the theme, since most are back into the swing of class schedules, homework, and packing lunches each day. But this year, we decided to put a twist on our usual Back to School issue and instead create the Back to (Old) School issue, a month that will be focused on analog-related content (think anything pre-Internet).

In choosing our book to fit our theme, we landed on *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, which centers around a bygone era of a time before everything was at our fingertips. The sto-

ry is told in a series of 13 interrelated stories with a wide cast of characters, all of whom circle the lives of aging record exec and former punk rocker Bennie Salazar and Sasha, a troubled young woman he employs.

Although Bennie and Sasha never discover each other's pasts within the pages, we as readers are given a view into their lives, past and present as well as public and secret, spanning across time from the 1970s to present and into their near future, and across space from locales as varied as New York to Kenya, San Francisco to Naples, and many places in between.

Egan expertly uses an array of styles and tones throughout, creating a book about the interaction of time and music, about survival, and about how we as people are caught between the choice of self-destruct-



tion and self-redemption, often reaching for both as time continues on. – Ally Kutz

1 p.m. // Werner Books and Coffee, 3608 Liberty St. // Free to join, cost of book not included // For more info: wernerbooks.com

May You Always Be Satisfied: Renee Elise Goldsberry at MIAC

Broadway star showcases versatility on Mary D'Angelo stage

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 30

There are some seasons where everything seems to click – and right on cue for September, Erie will be gifted a fabulous concert by the masterful Renée Elise Goldsberry.

Music lovers are most likely familiar with Goldsberry for her well-known and award-winning role as Angelica Schuyler in Broadway's *Hamilton*, while many fans were first introduced to her through her extremely popular "Satisfied" when it was re-released on her solo album. And this month, Erie audiences can attend a concert that showcases the high-level performance and many fine layers of Goldsberry's career.

"I think audiences can expect a concert that showcases just how versatile Ms. Goldsberry is. Renée Elise Goldsberry is an extraordinary artist who seems capable of doing just about anything," says Brett Johnson, Ph.D., artistic director of the Mercyhurst Institute for Arts & Culture. "There is also tremendous educational value in simply watching a world-class artist at work."

Attendees will experience a show

that draws selections from different eras of Goldsberry's career: Broadway (*The Lion King*, *Rent*, and *Hamilton*), her debut solo album *Who I Really Am* (incorporating her soulful sound with pop, folk, gospel, and blues influences), and the widely acclaimed television series *Girls5Eva* (featuring a '90s

"Renée Elise Goldsberry is an extraordinary artist who seems capable of doing just about anything." – Brett Johnson, artistic director of MIAC

girl group on its comeback tour).

"For our students, particularly those studying theater and music," says Johnson, "the opportunity to see an artist of Ms. Goldsberry's caliber command the concert stage offers its own kind of master class in performance, musicianship, storytelling, and communication. That kind of experience is an important part of what MIAC brings to the Mercyhurst experience."

Goldsberry's tour offers us an inspired performance for late sum-

CONTRIBUTED



Grab your tickets now for the highly anticipated performance from Renée Elise Goldsberry coming to MIAC – expect a medley of work from the multi-talented performer including samples from her Broadway career (including *Rent* and *Hamilton*), her solo album, and television appearances.

mer. "What excites me most is the opportunity for Erie audiences to experience that full range of artistry live," says Johnson. – Erica Stewart

7:30 p.m. // Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. // \$35-\$60 // For tickets and info: miac.mercyhurst.edu

Closer to Fine: Folk Rock Duo The Indigo Girls Come to Chautauqua

An interview with Emily Saliers ahead of their regional performance

By Larry Wheaton

For over 40 years, folk rock duo the Indigo Girls have been fusing music with activism and awareness for marginalized communities. Amy Ray and Emily Saliers started their journey in Atlanta, Georgia in the '80s and have continued to work together, growing a dedicated fan base over the decades. Erie Reader contributing writer Larry Wheaton spoke with Emily Saliers about this tour, activism, faith, and the *Barbie* movie.

Larry Wheaton (LW): I saw your on-line post regarding your recent health diagnosis (in April 2026 Emily Saliers was diagnosed with two incurable movement disorders: cervical dystonia with torticollis and an essential tremor), how has that affected your live performances or does it change how the songs may be performed?

Emily Saliers (ES): Basically, because of this neurological condition it's physically impossible for me to hold very long straight tones like I used to be able to and my voice gets more fatigued more easily. So we used to play three or four shows in a row, and now we are really trying to play two shows max and then take a day off for rest. The songs that we picked which are easier on me seem to be Amy's songs for the most part, but there are songs of mine that are just more difficult for me to sing, so we just picked songs that I am able to handle.

Lucy Roche helps, she will take some lines that are just too high for me anymore and sing those and she is a great harmony singer. So we have this really sweet harmonic glue together and basically do everything we can to bring the best show we possibly can to the standards we always held for ourselves.

LW: You were last at the Chautauqua Institute in August of 2024 with Melissa Etheridge. It's a unique place with a long history. What is it that you remember the most about the venue?

ES: It is a very cool looking venue, it's a very unusual looking venue and as you drive in there you feel like you are in this camp setting. So, the people are coming just to stay in these cabins for vacation, so it feels like this ideal little world of its own. Also, when I was a little girl, my dad was a professor and he took me and my mom and

sisters to Chautauqua. So I spent time at Chautauqua as a kid and I remember that really clearly – it's kind of a dreamy summer place.

LW: You worked with Amy on the *Glitter and Doom* soundtrack and recently finished the music for the musical *Starstruck*. How does it feel watching other people perform songs that you have written, compared to singing them yourself and do you see more musicals in your future?

ES: I love it so much when other people sing songs that I have written. I would almost rather hear someone else sing it, than sing it myself. I never really thought of myself as a singer per se and when you write for musical theater and you have these women and men and everything in between with these glorious voices – it's just so exciting to me. I don't know if I will ever get used to that. I know I am coming late to the party, but we had a really good run with *Starstruck* at Bucks County Playhouse and now we want to move to New York to a theater next fall. I am working on two other musicals at the same time, so this is a completely different creative outlet. One of the greatest joys is when you get a singer or actor on stage singing the songs – it's very exciting to me. I always wanted to write music for other people.

LW: You have been very active with a lot of social movements over the decades. Any advice to younger artists facing the current state of our nation?

ES: It's more important than ever to be an activist. I have so many friends that live in Minneapolis that are on the street and taking care of their neighbors when ICE swept through and broke that city's heart for a minute. Then they just built each other back up emotionally to their best ability. So, I would say to young artists and young people just get involved everywhere you can and it's absolutely critical to vote, even if you feel removed from the political system. It is obviously abhorrent what people in office can do to a nation and its people. So, it's really important to get involved. Younger people have a lot of energy, they are not afraid. I see this a lot in young activists and it's very inspiring and, in a way, I wish there were other musicians who took their part. I wish there were

CONTRIBUTED



Larry Wheaton catches up with Emily Saliers of the iconic Indigo Girls ahead of their performance at the Chautauqua Amphitheater this month. They discuss the longevity of the band and their commitment to tackling social justice issues through their music.

more mainstream artists who really got down to hardcore activism because they could be so influential.

LW: You wrote the book *A Song to Sing, a Life to Live, Reflections on Music as Spiritual Practice* with your father. It's now 20 years later – where would you place faith in your life today?

ES: We grew up in our family with my father being a professor of theology, we grew up going to church together, but we were always in an ecumenical academic setting so we went to church at Emory University. Even the chapel was set up so you could take the cross down and other groups of faith could have their religious gatherings in the space. So I grew up in a very ecumenical sort of progressive family. I never grew up with any conflict between sexuality and faith, identity and faith. Faith, to me, had to do with everything that you do to uphold the dignity of humanity in the natural world – that was something that was celebrated energetically. I have become less attached to dogma – I still enjoy the seasons, say for instance the Christian church, all the teachings of Jesus that have to do with diversity and love and that kind of activism. But I would say that my faith has become, while it is a guiding principle in my life, a much more indescribably and unfathomable energetic reality that responds to goodness.

LW: One of your most popular songs is "Closer To Fine," when it was featured in the *Barbie* Movie, did its success help you get a younger audience interested in your music?

ES: Totally! I have to say, we looked

at the numbers for a while and our monthly listeners jumped stratospherically relative to what they were – and then we started noticing younger folks in the audience. But then it all kind of settled down in terms of the listening numbers and I can't tell whether the bump helped, because we have a lot of young people, we have young women, we have kids, we have young queers, we have young men, which is very interesting. We had a teacher come up to us, this was in New Jersey, and he had just won this big teaching award and he came to thank me and Amy. This is a straight male dude teacher, and he came to thank me and Amy for our influence on his work and we were like, what the heck? I don't know if the staying power of the young demographic that we enjoy now is because of that movie or not. I like to think it was! We love Greta Gerwig and I loved the movie.

This interview has been edited for space. Read the full version at eriereader.com

Indigo Girls will be performing at the Chautauqua Institution on Thursday, Sept. 10 with tickets ranging from \$50 to \$150. It is recommended to show up early due to the distance of parking from the venue and to go through security before entering the grounds. For tickets and info: chq.org

Larry Wheaton is a musician and record collector, who's listened to all different styles of music. Some of his favorite bands are political in nature like Neil Young and The Clash. He can be reached at wheaton1138@gmail.com

Phoebe Bridgers

Lost Weekend
Dead Oceans



Some say that patience is a virtue – an opportunity to become greater in the face of adversity. I hark back to this proverb in reference to Phoebe Bridgers’ latest album, *Lost Weekend*. It’s been more than six years since the singer-songwriter’s sophomore record. However, this time was not spent in isolation. In 2023, she collaborated with contemporaries Julien Baker and Lucy Dacus under the name boygenius to release *The Record*. Following a lengthy tour, the musician went radio silent, wiping herself from social platforms and the public eye. On *Lost Weekend*, Phoebe returns rejuvenated and ambitious. Rather than rest on her indie folk laurels, the singer-songwriter experiments with electronica and ambient production, as heard in the vocoder passages on album opener “The Outside,” for instance. From there, the album unpacks grief, love, and disillusionment with fame in the greater technological age. At the thematic center of *Lost Weekend* is the death of Bridgers’ father in 2022, the album becoming an outlet for the musician to come to terms with his passing. Bridgers is not alone in this journey, enlisting a village’s worth of collaborators, including producer Jack Antonoff, folk artist Alex G, Geese frontman Cameron Winter, and comedian-musician Bo Burnham. On lead single “Lost Boys,” Bridgers sings, “This machine is killing me,” adapting Woody Guthrie’s iconic anti-fascist message for the modern age. With a completely phone-free tour on the horizon, it seems that one of the most compelling contemporary songwriter is ready to step back into the limelight. – Nathaniel Clark

Tony Grey featuring Bob James

Nostalgia
The Orchard / Sony Music



Jazz bassist Tony Grey is well known in both the international and local jazz communities for his smooth yet complex bass playing. He is an English-born musician and Berklee College of Music graduate, who is also a local music educator, composer, and author. On his sixth studio album *Nostalgia*, he has collaborated with legendary pianist Bob James, a pioneer in smooth jazz and a member in jazz supergroup Fourplay. The album starts with “Domino,” with Grey delivering an upbeat groove, mirroring his live performances. On the second track “Let It Happen,” the Bob James influence is evident – reminiscent of early works like “Angie” or “Nautilus” (one of the most sampled songs in hip-hop). Some other standout tracks are the eponymous “Nostalgia,” which perfectly blends standard jazz elements with fusion, the cinematic “How Far Is The Journey,” and the exotic-sounding “Dancing In Paradise.” The album ends with one of the most beautiful songs on *Nostalgia*, “Embraceable You.” This is the most stripped-down track, featuring Grey and James without any other accompaniment – showcasing their ability to play off each other and keep the listener fully engaged. This is a must-have for any fan of either artist or for someone just getting into the genre looking for something modern that mixes several jazz flavors into one album. –Larry Wheaton

Weezer

Weezer (Gold Album)
Reprise Records



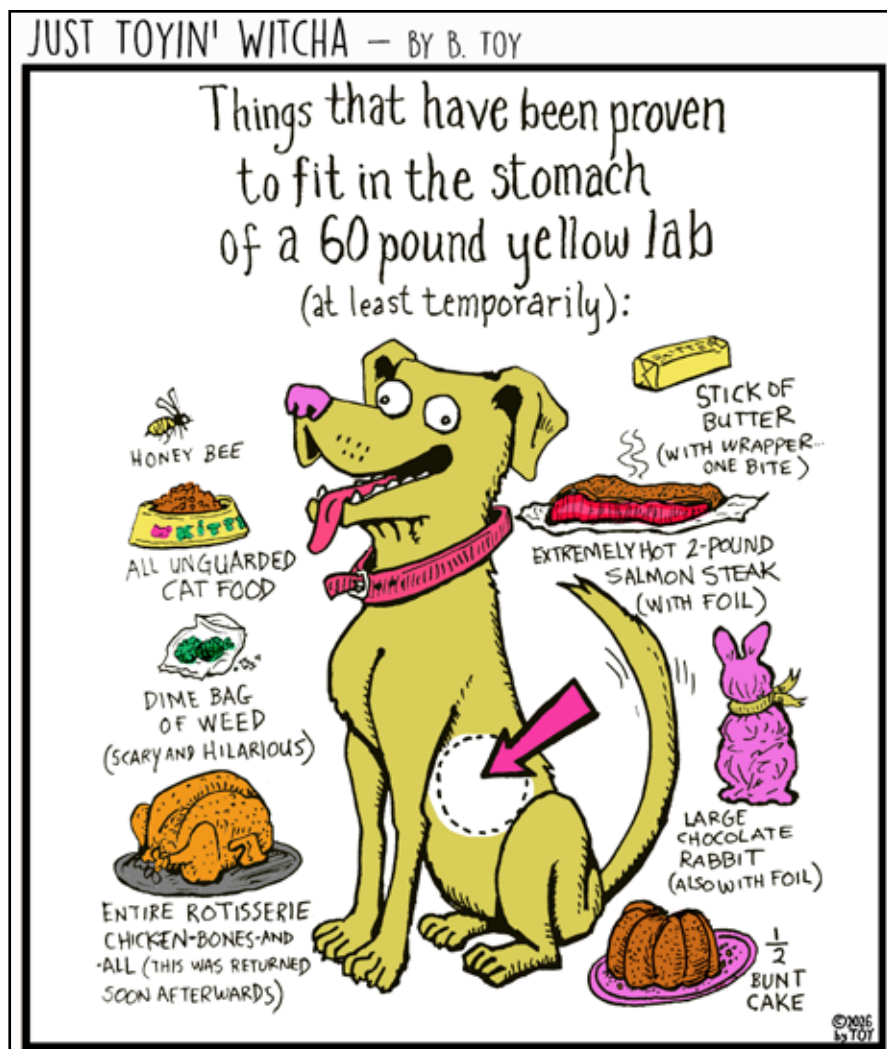
Weezer’s self-titled gold album is either their 16th, 17th, or 20th studio album, depending on who you ask and what releases they choose to include in that list. The fact is, over 30+ years, the power-pop giants best known for their first decade of music have run in circles chasing mainstream pop acceptance, obscure musical experiments, and the approval of longtime fans who just want another *Blue Album* or *Pinkerton*. While Weezer’s *Gold Album* doesn’t exactly break that cycle, it’s the closest they’ve come to merging at least two of those things into one shockingly fun project. *The Gold Album* marries Rivers Cuomo’s penchant for so-bad-it’s-good lyricism with the band’s best production in a decade. Lead single “Shine Again” echoes the riffs found on fan-favorite *Maladroit*, while second single (and duet with Wednesday’s Karly Hartzman) “We Might As Well Be Strangers” instantly feels more accessible. But the record itself falls somewhere in between, with corny song premises like “C.E.O.” (a pseudo-sequel to “Undone - The Sweater Song”) and “The LA Sound” getting by on sheer execution and guitar tones alone. While unlikely to be anyone’s favorite Weezer album since the ’90s, *The Gold Album* proves that Weezer officially moving into “classic rock” territory doesn’t mean they’re missing any energy. – Aaron Mook

Matt “Broke” Boland

Omnium-Gatherum
Self-released



A 37-track, double-disc, CD-only compilation with a running time well over 2.5 hours, *Omnium-Gatherum* shows who Matt “Broke” Boland is. For over 20 years, Boland has been tirelessly entertaining audiences in Erie and beyond. This release distills those efforts, as myriad as they are, into one wholly encompassing portrait of an artist. Neither meant to be an exhaustive discography nor a “greatest hits” record, the title describes it well — a faux-Latin term for a miscellaneous collection of things, a hodgepodge of various items. It is, in spite of this, fairly well organized. The 19-track first disc is titled “Broke’n Strings,” a play on both his cash-strapped, scrappy acoustic persona and his integration of fiddle, violin, and viola parts. The second (18-track) disc is titled “Electric Things” and caters to his amplified output. The anthology does exactly what it sets out to do. Like a curated beer flight, it provides a sampling of the diverse projects Boland has helmed, giving an overall flavor profile that’s more than the sum of its parts. The grouping helps, and there are even different versions of three songs that serve as definitive placemarkers. Without the online playlists and constantly shifting band names, titles, and album covers, it’s much easier to simply focus on Boland as the performer. With Matty B & the Dirty Pickles, Potwhole, Broke Boland (solo), the Broke Boland Band, The Broke Boland String Show, the (non-dirty) Matty & the Pickles, Bootlegger’s Bible Club, and his Buddy Holly theatrical revue, it’s understandably a little hard to keep it all straight. Through it all, his high-energy blend of rockabilly, folk, punk, bluegrass, indie, and Americana shines through. With tenacity, humor, passion, and the endless drive to perform, Boland feels poised to deliver at least another two decades for Erie’s music fans. – Nick Warren



Mabeline’s Poetry Corner: September 2026

YOU BELIEVED

By Mabel Howard

To be successful
To go back to school
School, a place for higher learning
School, a place that can raise your earnings
Earnings, the cost one pays for services
Earnings, will help you along this journey

Journey, constant movement into a direction
Journey, steps towards your future dreams
Dreams, of becoming known, not just seen
Dreams, to create paths that will lighten burdens
Burdens, no one should have to carry alone
Burdens, keep you away from places you belong

Belong, everyone should experience a sense of it
Belong, being yourself, not ever trying to fit in
In, a place you stay for as long as you want
In, and Out the way you choose to move
Move, strategically... there’s no rush to the end
Move, after you observe where you want to land

Land, because you’ve discovered the right foundation
Land, as you have written and also believed
BELIEVED, that you could truly move mountains
BELIEVED, that you would make it and bring others with you
YOU, born to lead all that were ready to follow
YOU, received the blessings because you focused on the PLAN.

Mabeline can be reached at gamewithmabel@gmail.com



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Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma is Messy in All the Best Ways

★★★★★

Scream queen

The slasher movie franchises of the 1980s have had a complicated history. Despised by critics of the time, dismissed by the mainstream, and loved by fans seemingly for cheap, visceral thrills, many of these films have been reappraised as subversive statements

on our fear of and fascination with sex and violence. Jane Schoenbrun (*I Saw the TV Glow*) brings this dichotomy to the forefront with their new film *Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma*, a psychosexual journey into the appeal of horror films that con-

trasts the (sometimes problematic) catharsis of slasher films with today's era of market-approved horror and performative "M."

Kris Williams (Hannah Einbinder) is a young filmmaker who has been tapped to reboot the long-running *Camp Miasma* slasher franchise. She travels to the abandoned summer camp of the first film to meet the enigmatic "final girl" of the original, Billy Presley (Gillian Anderson, channeling the best of Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard*). But as the two women connect, the *Camp Miasma* films reawaken a long buried desire in Kris as reality and fantasy begin to intersect.

The film is at its best when dissecting that strange line between viewer and media and the confusing feelings that come when one has their first sexual experience while watching a horror film (the fact that the killer in

the series is named "Little Death" just drives that point home).

They're clearly a fan, but Schoenbrun doesn't shy away from the often misogynistic and transphobic elements in old horror films. This makes that fascination doubly confusing for LGBTQIA+ individuals. The film is often messy and convoluted in its messaging, but that is so frequently the case when dealing with human desire. – Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Jane Schoenbrun // Starring Hannah Einbinder, Gillian Anderson, Amanda Fix, Arthur Conti, Eva Victor, Zach Cherry, Sarah Sherman, Jasmin Savoy Brown, Quintessa Swindell, Kevin McDonald, Aren Buchholz, Florence Barrett, Jack Haven, Patrick Fischler, and Dylan Baker // Plan B Entertainment // 112 minutes // Rated R



Coyote vs. Acme is a Minor Miracle

★★★★☆

That's all folks!

The fact that we are able to see the new animation/live-action mashup *Coyote vs. Acme* in theaters at all is a minor miracle. Despite being completed and receiving enthusiastic support at test screenings, Warner Bros. Discovery CEO David Zaslav originally planned to shelve the film as a tax write-off. A three-year long grassroots campaign eventually convinced

the company to reverse that decision and that is cause for celebration. It is also cause for celebration because the film is extremely funny and entertaining, with smart dialogue, likable characters, and a surprisingly engaging story, the film is a joy from beginning to end. It might not be on the level of a masterpiece like *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, but it's sure to

delight kids and adults in equal measure.

After years of using faulty Acme products to catch a supersonic roadrunner, Wile E. Coyote has had enough. He travels to the big city and hires jaded small-time lawyer Kevin Avery (Will Forte) to sue the Acme Corporation for damages. Initially reluctant, Avery soon discovers a sin-

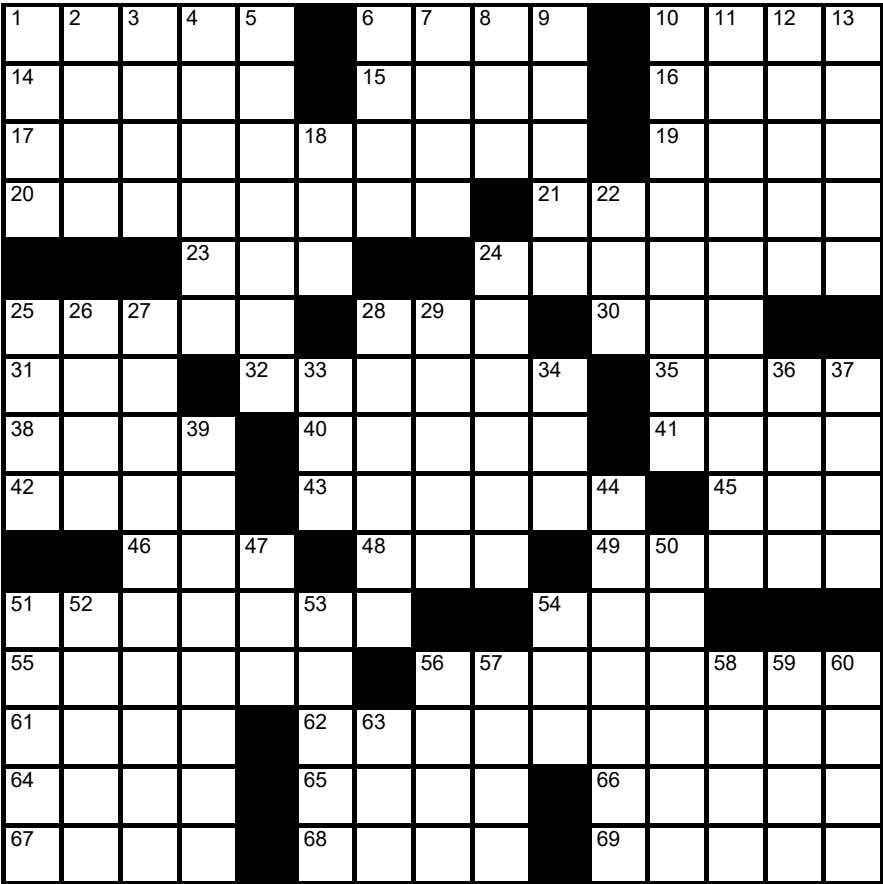
ister conspiracy within Acme and as he delves deeper, the secrets he uncovers could put his and the Coyote's lives in jeopardy.

Like the aforementioned *Roger Rabbit*, the film takes a classic film genre (the legal thriller instead of film noir) and "toonifies" it. While silly and ridiculous things happen within the story, the story itself is treated completely seriously making it effectively engaging. It has a timeless sense of humor that can appeal to all ages, making this the perfect kind of family entertainment.

See it because it's a good movie, or see it just to spite David Zaslav! – Forest Taylor

Directed by Dave Green // Written by Samy Burch // Based on the New Yorker article by Ian Frazier // Starring Will Forte, Lana Condor, Tone Bell, Eric Bauza, P.J. Byrne, Martha Kelly, Luis Guzman, Kenneth Choi, John Early, Jeff Bergman, Candi Milo, Nancy Linehan Charles, Ernie Vigil, Jim Cummings, and John Cena // Warner Animation Group // 103 minutes // Rated PG





Across

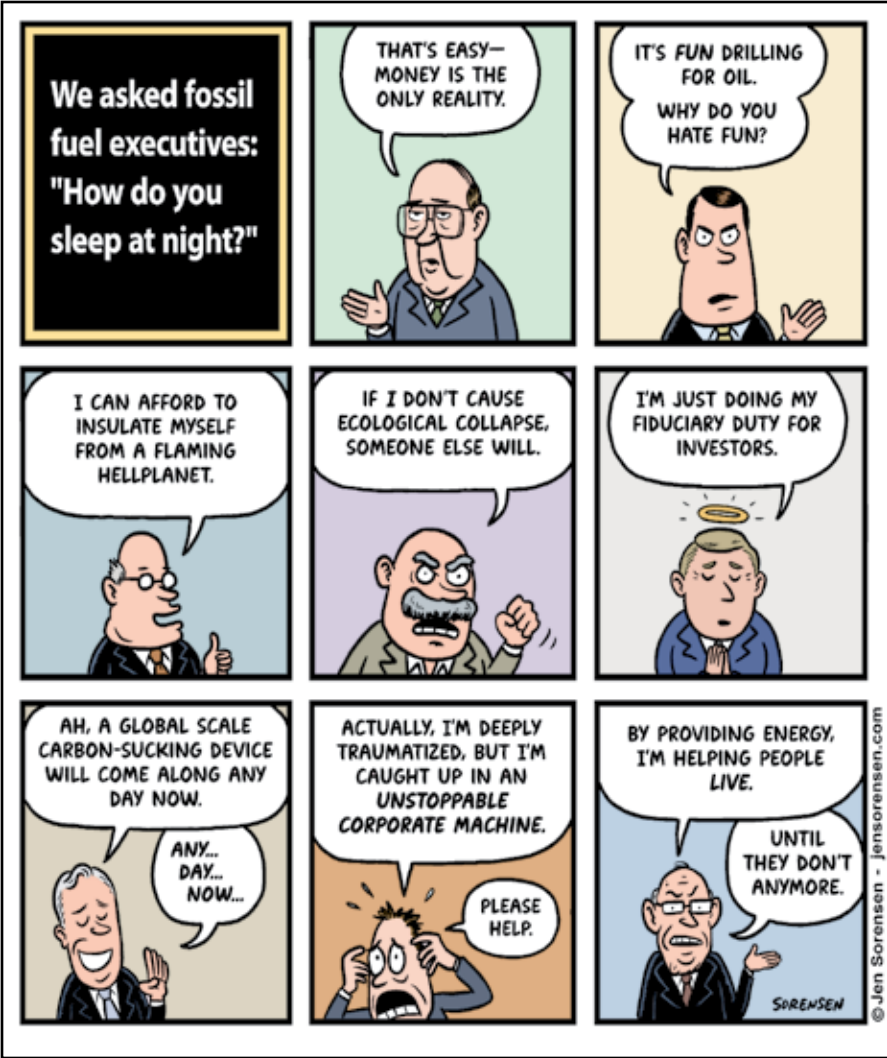
- 1. "Quiet!"
- 6. Chilled
- 10. "Say again?"
- 14. Kitchen appliance manufacturer
- 15. Drift around
- 16. Bug
- 17. Head snake?
- 19. School attended by Ian Fleming
- 20. Greater or Lesser islands
- 21. Large numbers
- 23. Rep.'s rival
- 24. Milk sugar
- 25. Incinerator debris
- 28. "Don't do drugs" ad, e.g.
- 30. Employee of Santa
- 31. Zhou En-___
- 32. Objects
- 35. "Benevolent" lodge members
- 38. Keystone structure
- 40. Openly disobey
- 41. 2021 Timothee Chalamet movie
- 42. "Just Do It" company
- 43. Genetically doubled
- 45. Middling grade
- 46. Host Shapiro or Melber
- 48. Greek wedding shout
- 49. "Star Trek: TNG" first officer
- 51. "Game of Thrones" character who's told that

- he knows nothing
- 54. Director Craven
- 55. Commonplace
- 56. "The Phantom Menace" designation
- 61. Velodrome vehicle
- 62. Vacation spot full of bees?
- 64. Judith of "Designing Women"
- 65. Reduce a sentence?
- 66. "SNL" alum Murphy
- 67. "Say Hey" Hall of Famer
- 68. Part
- 69. Scans in

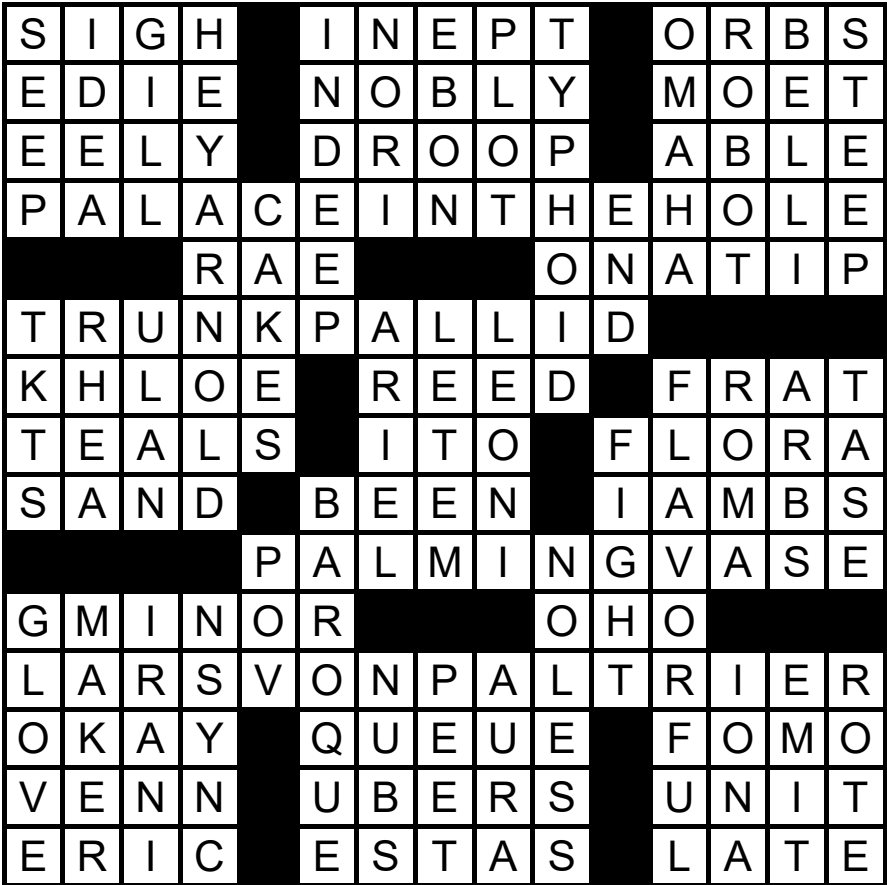
Down

- 1. Pritzker Architecture Prize winner Hadid
- 2. Hacker's exclamation of success (or so movies tell me)
- 3. It's behind you
- 4. Behind closed doors
- 5. World's ___ Thermometer (attraction in Baker, Calif.)
- 6. "Dies ___" (Latin hymn)
- 7. New England fishes
- 8. Genesis figure
- 9. Skin layer
- 10. Went to the mat
- 11. #1 songs that bring good fortune?
- 12. Lotion additives
- 13. All wound up
- 18. Shade tree
- 22. Royal flush card

- 24. ___ Beach (Orange County city)
- 25. "Beauty and the Beast" composer Menken
- 26. Madras wrap
- 27. Requirement to decode the jargon of a guy from the sticks?
- 28. Feather-filled item
- 29. Meddlesome sort
- 33. Compound used in air conditioning to replace the more potent "chloro-" version
- 34. Sault ___ Marie, Ontario
- 36. On bended ___
- 37. Prognosticator
- 39. Letters on a bar?
- 44. Bedroom furniture piece
- 47. TV chef Garten
- 50. Tristan's operatic lover
- 51. "The Girl From Ipanema" composer
- 52. '60s-'70s Twins star Tony
- 53. Last questionnaire option, often
- 54. Console whose last games were released in 2020
- 56. Wicked
- 57. Comedian Holmes
- 58. Nihilistic art genre
- 59. Author Blyton
- 60. Monthly midpoint
- 63. Vow phrase



Answers to last puzzle





THE JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY PRESENTS: GLOBAL SUMMIT XVIII

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22 - THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19



TICKETS & INFO!

2026 HEADLINER



A Moderated Conversation with Michelle Obama

Monday, October 12 | 6 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena

Featuring: Michelle Obama



*President Trump, the MAGA Movement, and 2028:
What's Next for the GOP*

Tuesday, September 22 | 7 p.m.

Jefferson Educational Society

Featuring: Hugh Hewitt



*Steeler Legend & Fox Sports Broadcaster Talks
Everything Football*

Thursday, September 24 | 7 p.m.

Bayfront Convention Center

Featuring: Terry Bradshaw



How Erie is Shaping Ukraine's Future

Tuesday, September 29 | 7 p.m.

Jefferson Educational Society

Featuring: Ambassador William B. Taylor (left) and Jim Berlin



ERIE REGIONAL CHAMBER
AND ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

*Lake Erie Launchpad: Emerging Erie
Entrepreneurs*

Tuesday, October 27 | 7 p.m.

Jefferson Educational Society

Featuring: Erie entrepreneurs, innovators, funders, and investors



*Looking Back While Forging Ahead: Examining
Erie's Economic Development*

Wednesday, October 28 | 7 p.m.

Gannon University Waldron Campus Center

Featuring: Steve Leeper (left) and Tim NeCastro



*March, Run, Vote: Graphic Storytelling and the
Fight for Democracy*

Thursday, October 29 | 7 p.m.

Gannon University Waldron Campus Center

Featuring: Andrew Aydin (right) and Nate Powell



2026 Thomas B. Hagen Dignitas Award Recipient

Thursday, October 1 | 7 p.m.

Jefferson Educational Society

Featuring: Bishop Sean W. Rowe



*'The 1619 Project': Examining the Origins
of American Slavery 400 Years Later*

Wednesday, November 4 | 7 p.m.

Bayfront Convention Center

Featuring: Nikole Hannah-Jones



*The 'Godfather' of AI: Geoffrey Hinton
on the New Frontier of Technology*

Monday, October 5 | 7 p.m.

Gannon University Waldron Campus Center

Featuring: Geoffrey Hinton



*From the Revolution to World Wars,
the Battles That Defined America*

Monday, November 9 | 7 p.m.

Gannon University Waldron Campus Center

Featuring: Rick Atkinson



The US Constitution and Our Republic: Will We Keep It?

Monday, October 19 | 7 p.m.

Jefferson Educational Society

Featuring: Jeffrey Rosen



*The Producers Behind Ken Burns' Award-
Winning PBS Documentaries*

Tuesday, November 10 | 7 p.m.

Gannon University Waldron Campus Center

Featuring: Sarah Botstein (left) and David Schmidt



*Gannon READS: "The Light We Give: How Sikh Wisdom
Can Transform Your Life"*

Tuesday, October 20 | 7 p.m.

Warner Theatre

Featuring: Simran Jeet Singh



*The Mingle Project: Restoring Civility in Our
Society through Gathering*

Thursday, November 12 | 7 p.m.

Gannon University Waldron Campus Center

Featuring: Michael Smerconish



*Why the Transatlantic Alliance Matters: Protecting
Ukraine's Children and Europe's Next Generation*

Wednesday, October 21 | 7 p.m.

Gannon University Waldron Campus Center

Featuring: Sally Painter (right) and Mariam Lambert



A Post Election Conversation with Margaret Hoover

Tuesday, November 17 | 7 p.m.

Jefferson Educational Society

Featuring: Margaret Hoover



*America's Homeland Security:
25-Years After 9/11*

Thursday, October 22 | 7 p.m.

Jefferson Educational Society

Featuring: (from left) Jeh Johnson, Fran Townsend, and Tom Ridge



*The Author of 'Autocracy Inc.' on How Dictators Are
Working Together to Run the World*

Thursday, November 19 | 7 p.m.

Gannon University Waldron Campus Center

Featuring: Anne Applebaum