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**ERIE READER**

Jan. 2023 // Vol. 13 No. 1 // [ErieReader.com](http://ErieReader.com)

# The 2022 Best of Erie Awards

*Your favorite local people, places, and things*

## Lavery Brewing Company

*Owners Nicole and Jason Lavery on their decade of growth*

## Dafmark Dance Theater

*How dance education is working to bring art to everyone*

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# CONTENTS

## JANUARY 11, 2023

### From the Editors: January 2023 - 4

A toast to the Best of Erie

### Erie At Large: Securing Voter Suppression - 6

A look at the legislative tactics aimed at disenfranchising voters

### Real Deals - 8

How thrift stores help our community

### Dance Education With a Social Consciousness - 10

How Dafmark is working to bring art to everyone

### 2022 Best of Erie Winners and Finalists - 15

Your favorite people, places, and things in the Erie area

### Gem City Style: Best of Erie 2022 - 24

A Q&A with Best Local Entrepreneurs of 2022 Jason and Nicole Lavery of Lavery Brewing Company

### OpenedEyes and Culturally Conscious - 26

Growing organization promotes self-awareness, inclusion, and diversity

### Spotlight on Erie - 28

If you've got no place to go when you're feeling down, take a chance-chance on these events: Mania the ABBA Tribute, As I Am LGBTQIA+ art show, Restaurant Week and more!

### Film Reviews - 37

Avatar wades in shallow water while The Fabelmans inspires

### Album Reviews - 38

New cuts from BROCKHAMPTON, Fleshwater, Vulfpeck, and Fireworks

### Local, Original Comics - 40

From Melissa Sullivan, Brad Pattullo, John Bavaro, Bryan Toy, and Tommy Link

### Book Reviews - 41

The Wilderwomen and Did Ye Hear Mammy Died? both impress





From the Editors

A toast to the Best of Erie

Have you ever proposed 30 consecutive toasts at a single feast? At a traditional Georgian *supra*, a master of ceremonies called the *tamada* (“toastmaster” or “dictator of the table”) might ask you to raise your glass just that many times, and finish every last drop while you’re at it. Early on, you’ll probably be drinking to the health of the living or for the souls of the dead — fairly standard ritual offering procedure. But after the *tamada* runs out of (or conveniently forgets about) obvious categories, it’s anyone’s guess. Just try to enjoy the *khachapuri* (cheese bread) and *khinkali* (dumplings) without *khin-keeling* over, whether from laughter or from excess.

Luckily, the toasting categories are already set in our annual Best of Erie Awards — 116 would be a lot for even the hardest *tamada*. That’s why we’ve democratized the process, asking you to choose the people, places, and things you’d lift your glasses for. Over half a million votes later, we have the answers, and we’re just as eager to celebrate with you this year as we were in 2014.

Of course, communal bonding need not entail sharing of cups (or online voting results). We can welcome others in through the sharing of ideas. We can find common ground through the sharing of experiences, as Brandon Wiley has with his OpenedEyes organization (highlighted by Amy VanScoter). We can forge connections by offering up a platform (such as Penn State Behrend and Compton Table’s *As I Am* art exhibit for LGBTQIA+ youth), an opportunity (Dafmark Dance Theatre’s arts programs for the underprivileged), or a memory (thrift stores).

In addition to our Best of Erie winners, we propose a toast to all of the above. And although Georgian custom states that beer is only shared with enemies, we are forever proud to clink glasses with this issue’s cover models and dear friends Jason and Nicole Lavery (interviewed herein by Jessica



Whether or not you’ve ever raised a glass at a traditional Georgian *supra*, we feel that cheers are in order for our 116 Best of Erie award winners representing the best people, places, and things in Erie for the ninth year in a row.

Hunter), named this year’s Best Local Entrepreneurs for their extensive contributions to the Erie community — in the form of liquids (Dulachan, finally voted Best Locally Made Beer after years as a close runner-up) and many a solid (advocacy for women’s education, mental health, area tourism, and more).

Making Erie a better place to be the best? We’ll drink to that.

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ErieReader.com | Erie Reader | 5



# Erie at Large: Securing Voter Suppression

A look at the legislative tactics aimed at disenfranchising voters

By: Jim Wertz

Republicans in the Pennsylvania General Assembly are reliably consistent on two related fronts. In recent years, they've pushed a spate of voter suppression legislation under the guise of election security, and when they believe their undemocratic legislative efforts will die on the tip of the governor's veto pen, they try to place their agenda on the ballot as a constitutional amendment. It's a move designed to usurp the governor's veto power and to undermine the legislative process.

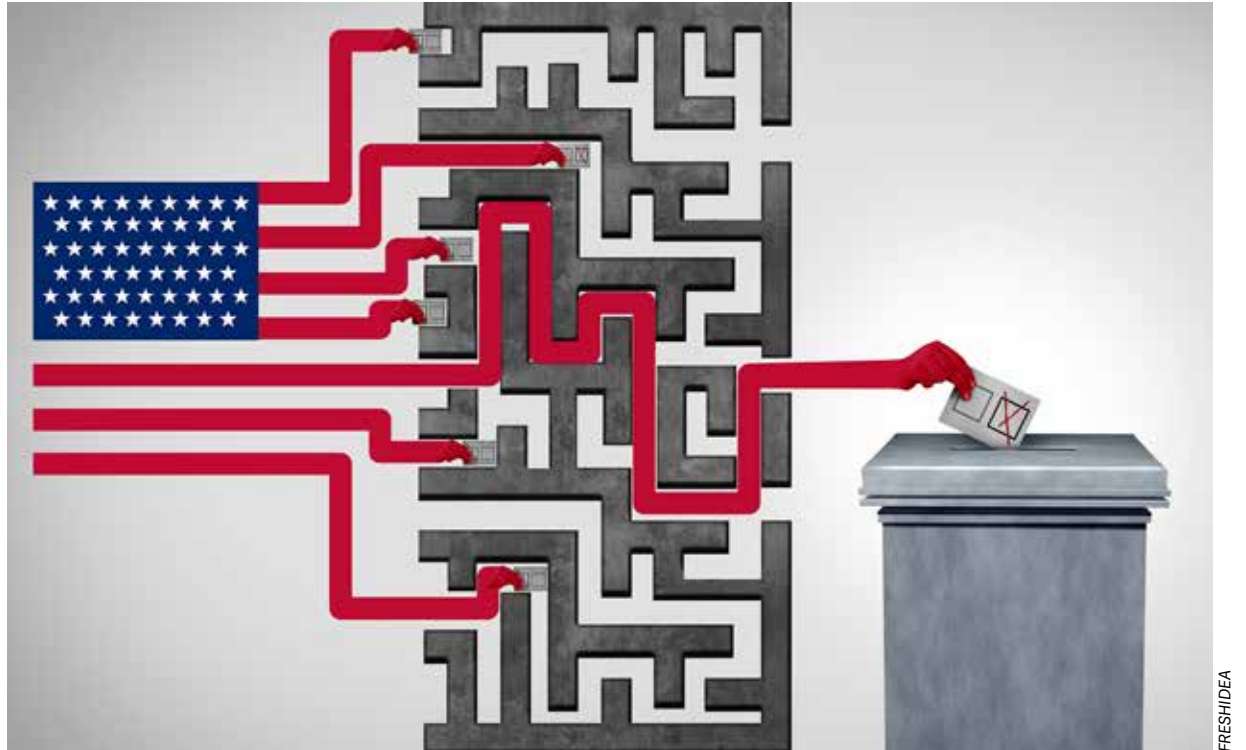
Following suit, Erie's Republican State Senator Dan Laughlin announced in December that he would introduce a constitutional amendment to require every Pennsylvania voter to show identification each time they go to the polls. Currently, voters are only required to show ID the first time they vote or the first time they vote at a new polling place as a result of a change of address.

In order to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot, it must pass through the General Assembly in two consecutive terms. Laughlin's bill, Senate Bill 1 of the 2023-2024 legislative session, would be the second passage of a voter ID amendment that was introduced by Republican State Senator Judy Ward and passed in the 2021-2022 legislative session. If passed, SB1 could be on the ballot in the May 16 primary election.

Universal voter ID laws, like the one proposed by Laughlin, are widely seen as an attempt to suppress the votes of young voters and poor voters, particularly Black and Latino voters in those categories, who are less likely to have a government-issued ID.

The costs associated with obtaining a government-issued ID like a drivers license or a non-driver state ID can be prohibitive for many people, even when states offer free ID. That's because those ID seekers might have to take time off work, pay fees to other governmental agencies for a birth certificate or another primary form of identification, or incur significant travel costs to get to a location where ID services are available. The travel burden can be significant for the disabled, the elderly, and people who live in rural areas without access to public transportation, according to data collected by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

Other states that have passed universal voter ID laws appear to have specifically targeted rural poor and Black voters. In Texas, some rural residents travel as far as 170 miles round trip to the nearest state ID office; and in Alabama, state officials closed 31 drivers license centers — mostly located in majority Black counties — one year after enacting a strict voter ID law. A 2014 study by the Government Accountability Office found that unnecessarily strict voter ID laws can reduce voter turnout by 2 to 3 percentage points, which could be significant considering that the margin of victory in Pennsylvania during the last two presidential elections was less than 2 percent.



**Erie's Republican State Senator Dan Laughlin announced that he would put forth a constitutional amendment requiring voters to present identification to vote. Such actions are widely understood to be an attempt to suppress the votes of young, poor, or already marginalized voters.**

It probably doesn't need to be explained, but the people most affected by voter ID requirements tend to vote Democrat when they go to the polls. So it seems all too clear that Pennsylvania Republicans in the General Assembly — most of whom favored overturning the results of the 2020 presidential election — are simply setting the stage to legitimize the coup they failed to pull off last go-round.

Laughlin argues that SB1 has widespread public support, and it did. But that's only because of widespread misinformation and false claims about voter fraud in the 2020 election. Laughlin's co-sponsorship memo introducing the bill references a June 2021 Franklin & Marshall poll in which 74 percent of Pennsylvanians said they support a law requiring all voters to show ID to vote. But this poll was conducted as the conspiracy to overturn the 2020 election raged on, and false claims were repeated (ad nauseam) by Republican pundits and elected officials alike.

A review of Franklin & Marshall polls by PoliticsPA.com found that the same question yielded much less support — just 26 percent — when asked in May 2022, and almost no support — just 1 percent — in August 2020, before the "Big Lie" permeated the political landscape.

In other words, voter ID laws have virtually no support among Pennsylvania voters without the lies and half truths about election security in the commonwealth.

That's because the system works.

According to a report by the York Daily Record,

prosecutors across Pennsylvania filed charges in just four cases of voter fraud in the 2020 election. Three of those four offenders were registered Republicans who attempted to vote in person for deceased or absent voters, and the fourth was a registered Democrat in Bucks County attempting to complete a mail-in ballot for her mother, who passed away in September 2020 after legally requesting the ballot. Election officials in Bucks County flagged the forged signature on the external envelope and identified the voter as deceased before notifying police. The envelope was set aside and the ballot was never even opened. The checks and balances set in place by county election staff proved successful in all four cases.

Nevertheless, Laughlin persists.

It's the continuation of a broader "will of the people" strategy to undermine democratic processes in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. And in his new role as Republican policy chair in the Pennsylvania Senate, Laughlin controls the flow of hearings and data collection that inform the Republican legislative policy agenda in the Senate, including this proposed constitutional amendment.

Let's just hope he won't need Rudy Giuliani to come back and explain it.

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## Real Deals

### How thrift stores help our community

By: Liz Allen

After my niece Marissa purged her closet, I really cleaned up and left her suburban Philadelphia home with an armload of fashions from The Loft. But then I had to find room in my own closet for my gently worn hand-me-downs, including a lilac pashmina, a shamrock-green blazer, black yoga pants, and two camel skirts. As I piled up wardrobe discards, like the slim red skirt that hasn't fit me since the late '80s, I wondered how to put my cast-offs to better use.

That's when I remembered that several friends had urged me to write about the Green Scene Thrift Store and Thrifter Heaven, two businesses that support good causes by selling donations at low prices, reducing landfill waste in the process. The proprietors of those stores, in turn, put me in touch with Vicki Stetson, who founded 4 N.I.N.E. thrift store to help people in North East 23 years ago.

The staff of 4 N.I.N.E. at 49 Smedley St. (with additional space at 103 Clay St.), is "100 percent volunteer," said Stetson. "Nobody is ever paid for anything." But the store gives back in many ways. Stetson calculated that in the past year, 4 N.I.N.E., a 501(c)(3), contributed at least \$91,749.68 to such organizations and programs as the Sunshine Group, Early Connections Preschool, the Philharmonic in the Park concerts, Hooked on Books, the North East Shade Tree Commission, Habitat for Humanity, the Gravel Pit Park playground, and the Erie City Mission, among many others.

Each type of donation is sold for a set cost. For example, all T-shirts are priced at \$1. That efficient merchandising keeps regulars coming back. Shoppers "get a heck of a deal and they tell all their friends," Stetson said. Although only 35 people are allowed inside at any one time due to fire code, customers line up outside no matter the weather, waiting for entry.

Stetson recently sent a letter to thank volunteers and to reflect on the good deeds their efforts make possible. "Every time I come through the front door, I marvel at the clean floors, stocked shelves, and general tidiness of the store," she wrote. "I see the massive clothing and linen piles disappear and reappear on a daily basis, the cases and cases of books sorted neatly and shelved, and the endless stream of toys priced and displayed. The housewares are always clean and arranged to attract a customer's eye and the electronics are tested and out for sale ... The card rack is always full, the jewelry is attractively showcased, and seasonal and holiday items appear at just the right time from the amazingly organized upstairs."

Angie Collins and her husband, Aaron, were searching for ways to support mission projects, here and abroad, a project started by her late grandparents, Mother Mary Beth and the Rev. Charles Kennedy Sr., and her parents, Cynthia and the late Charles Kennedy Jr.



(top) Housewares like these mugs, as well as apparel, books, furniture, shoes, accessories, and more line the walls of Green Scene Thrift at 1301 E. Grandview. (bottom left) "Our mission is to keep as much stuff out of the landfill as possible," says Ann Marie Brooks, manager of the Green Scene thrift store. (bottom right) Angie Collins, who founded Thrifter Heaven to help continue the legacy of her late grandparents, waits on Elizabeth Damon, a frequent customer.

Stetson, Collins' godmother, encouraged her to try the thrift store model, rather than asking donors to give small amounts here and there. After her grandmother died in January 2020, Collins decided to follow through with Stetson's suggestion to open a store, Thrifter Heaven, and proceeds benefit the Legacy of Love Foundation her grandparents established.

When COVID hit, Collins, who is also executive director of Community Country Day School, and her husband had more time to put the store plan into motion. School was shut down. Their four boys were at home. Aaron Collins had stored a couple of mannequins in the garage that could be used for fashion displays.

Still, Collins voiced some qualms. "What if we get all our friends to donate and we sell out?" she wondered. Stetson assured her that by offering consistent low prices and enlisting dedicated volunteers, the store would thrive and provide a successful income stream for Legacy of Love projects, including feeding programs, farming projects and schools in Congo, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, as well as for local needs. "I think the true feeling is that this is what God wants for me. There are so many people that can't do it for themselves, people around the world," Collins said. She loves to donate clothes for her best friend from Erie, Cheri Lyn Kolbas Perez, to take back to Perez's mission in the Dominican Republic, the Heart of the Nation. Or to



pack up a barrel of clothing to send to the Philip-pines. “People in those countries are so thankful for nice clothes,” she said.

Collins is also grateful to foundation board mem-ber Laurie Bondi and her husband, real estate agent Joseph Bondi, for helping them find space to rent at 4455 W. Ridge Road. The store is one level, which is good for shoppers and volunteers, and has easy parking. Elizabeth Damon shops at Thrifter Heav-en several times a month, often for books like Dean Koontz thrillers. “The prices are good and there’s always something different,” said Damon, who also bought a couple of window weatherization kits at a bargain price.

Collins said she is always looking for reliable vol-unteers to join people like Erna Kahteran, 22, whose parents came to this country in 1995 after fleeing Bosnia with just “a bag of clothing.” Kahteran vol-unteers at Thrifter Heaven because she enjoys wait-ing on “happy people” when they find great deals on clothing, housewares, jewelry, knickknacks, music (including vinyl albums), and seasonal decorations.

Stetson’s 4 N.I.N.E. success also helped to inspire Nicole Gladitz, founder of Green Scene, a thrift store dedicated to reducing waste headed to the landfill. “I came from a retail background and saw waste year after year,” Gladitz said. She also remembered the large amount of trash that had to be hauled away every spring when the city of Erie held its annual

big-item curbside pickup. Gladitz, a thrifty shopper herself, was also curious about the fate of items she donated to various groups. “Were they dumping it? Did magic stuff happen to it?”

To learn how to run an efficient thrift store that keeps stuff out of the landfill, she volunteered for two years at 4 N.I.N.E. before she opened Green Scene at 1301 E. Grandview Blvd. three and a half

“I came from a retail background and saw waste year after year. Were they dumping it? Did magic stuff happen to it?” ~ Nicole Gladitz, founder of Green Scene, a thrift store dedicated to reducing waste headed to the landfill

years ago. “Our mission is to keep as much (as pos-sible) out of the landfill,” she said. “If you’re not sure what to do with it, as long as it’s something we take, just get it to a place like ours.” Like the other thrift stores, Green Scene doesn’t accept TVs, mattresses, or baby items such as cribs.

But the store staff and volunteers work diligently to find homes for everything else. If something can’t be sold, components like metal might go to a recy-cler. There are also bins out front to recycle glass for Bayfront Glass. Gladitz is also tickled that her store has recently been able to donate to the expERIENCE Children’s Museum and will help educate museum visitors about how to reuse and recycle.

Like the other thrift stores, inviting displays are important for Green Scene. With every donation, “We try to clean it and display it and make people think differently (about how they might use it),” Gladitz said. That’s why the array of fitness prod-ucts caught my eye. After all, I want to fit into my “new” yoga pants.

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

If you go: The best source for information about these three thrift stores is to visit their Facebook pages: 4 N.I.N.E. Thrift Store, Thrifter Heaven, and Green Scene Thrift. There, you will find information about store hours, links to websites and other social media, contacts for donating or volunteering, and details about special promotions, such as Free Fridays on the second Friday of the Month at Green Scene or items offered on eBay. These stores are also always in need of men’s and children’s clothing.



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# Dance Education With a Social Consciousness

How Dafmark is working to bring art to everyone

By: Erin Phillips

When I think of the ballet, I tend to think of rigid standards, a certain body type (youthful, thin, white), and the constant vigilance (and mangled feet) of those dancers who dedicate their lives to the art. Dafmark Dance Theater has turned that preconception on its head. As I spoke with executive director Jean-Marc Baier as well as Dafmark's long time champion Jennifer Dennehy (who also happens to be a 2018 Erie Reader 40 Under 40 Alum), I learned that the vision for their studio not only includes the full artistic spectrum of performance (including dance, but also music, poetry, and visual arts), but also includes the goal of encouraging everyone to embrace what the art of dance (and beyond) has to offer, regardless of age, ability, body type, or income level.

In their gorgeous, historic dance studio on the third floor of what is known as the Lincoln Building at 11th and State, I learned about all of the programs Dafmark and its cohorts have created and maintained (within this studio and throughout the community), and what they've accomplished is remarkable in its quality and inclusivity. The creation and funding behind those programs are due, in large part, to the efforts of Dennehy and her ability to find community partners, create meaningful educational programs, and write the grants to secure the funding necessary to make the programs successful. She is tenacious and passionate about the full potential of her work and so many people young and old have benefited from her efforts.

Throughout the years, Dafmark has worked to forge community relationships with various organizations in the community like Erie Homes for Children and Adults (EHCA) by leading a program called MOVE for adult residents, allowing folks with physical and intellectual disabilities the opportunity to learn healthy, creative movement. Dennehy has worked with the St. Martin's Early Learning Center for the past nine years, teaching young children the benefits of dance, stretch, and movement.

But their most recent partnership with the Housing Authority of the City of Erie (HACE) and its director, Michael Fraley, resulted in the creation of the Dafmark Creative Arts Center located in the John E. Horan Garden Apartments (located at 2110 E. 10th St.). This center is shaping up to be a life-changing program for many children living in public housing who are able to receive high quality art education spanning genres through classes that are meaningful to their lives.

For Jean-Marc Baier and his wife, Dafna Rathouse Baier (thus the amalgamation of the company name: Dafmark), bringing accessible arts to the community has truly been their life's work. Dafna was born in Tel Aviv, Israel and Jean-Marc in Paris, France. The couple came to Erie in 1984 when Jean-Marc was hired as the director of the Mercyhurst College Dance Depart-



Jennifer Dennehy (left) and Jean-Marc Baier have worked to bring the art of dance to many individuals in the Erie community who wouldn't have had access to arts education otherwise. Social consciousness is a part of their mission.

ment. They established Dafmark in 1990 and have been diligently pursuing their mission ever since: to offer a unique, creative, and educational experience in the art of dance that is steeped in social consciousness.

This doesn't just mean that they put on political performances (which they certainly do, most recently touching on the George Floyd murder as well as the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*) but now their efforts are working to bring about social change through accessible arts education. Jean-Marc reflects, "Education doesn't work unless it is connected to the art itself. So for children to learn how to draw by obtaining mechanical skill is not enough, without going to a museum and seeing what that drawing can end up as, its full value. This is what we've always had in the context of what we've been about. Dance is not just dance. Dance is a combination of all the other different art forms that allow for a voice to truly exist in

connection to the community."

What Dafmark has done and continues to do is a reflection of that ethos. Jean-Marc continues: "What has happened with Jen, and her extraordinary capability to obtain grants, is to create programs that don't exist. We have gone from a place of small impact to a place where now children are not only learning, they are learning from people who are true professionals ... The point is the connection to the individual and what happens around one in terms of society. As such, we've been unique in our comprehension of how you mesh education and art."

Meshing education and art is at the heart of the Dafmark Creative Arts Center. Located within the John Horan apartment complex, the after-school programs (which run daily from 2:30 to 6:30 p.m.) provide 10 arts classes each week across various mediums, employing over 20 teaching artists each year, and serving approximately 150 children. The pro-



gram is open to children from all across the city, but the focus of the outreach is specifically for children living in public housing. The classes taught include poetry, painting, photography, theater, hoop dance, dance techniques, stretching, ceramics, stop motion animation, creative construction, and music. The after-school program runs from January to May, and they also offer summer programming.

Dennehy considers these arts programs to be truly transformative for these children, for whom creative resources are often lacking in traditional (and underfunded) public school programs. She reflects on the larger impact of some of the art education being provided through this program: “Right now, one of my favorite classes to pop in and watch is Sarah Howard’s, who was a teaching artist with us this past fall (and will be teaching again in 2023). She’s doing a class called Creative Construction: she uses found objects and upcycled materials to build things, empowering the students to use power tools in a safe environment. The first project they undertook was using these big metal pieces and learning how to drill through them, connect them with screws, nuts and bolts, and then wire them to make their own unique lamps. It’s nice to see creative problem-solving in action. One of the kids built his structure and realized there wasn’t room for the wires to go through, so he had to problem-solve: ‘How do you fix that? How will this work?’”

Jean-Marc feels that this kind of programming fills



CONTRIBUTED

The Collaborative Mural class, facilitated by teaching artist Angela Howell, not only involves art instruction, but teaches the children to plan ahead, work together, and execute a collaborative vision.

in the gaps left behind when the arts were largely removed from schools, “We think the arts exist by themselves, but it’s not at all what happens in reality. Art is a means by which we understand living and

find ways to solve problems.” And for the teaching artists at the Dafmark Creative Arts Center, rewarding experiences abound through helping the kids unlock their creativity, hone their own problem-solving

# May this year be the best one yet!

Hope to see you in 2023.

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FEATURE

skills, and realize their potential.

Sarah Howard, the aforementioned power tool aficionado, reflects on the impact of these kinds of classes on the children, “I feel that the importance in my program lies in challenging the children. Most of what I use are tools the kids aren’t typically allowed to touch, much less use. And the repurposing of objects, many they’ve never seen before, pushes their creativity to another level. I believe that teaching the children safety protocols and giving them a controlled environment to physically use a power tool empowers them. The tools are no longer scary but a means to help them create things they never saw themselves creating.”

After seeing the positive impact of this art education, Dennehy noticed a missing link. The Dafmark Creative Arts Center also contains a 1,000 book library maintained by the Erie County Public Library System, and Dennehy realized that many of the children they serve in their arts program were struggling to read. So she got to work writing yet another grant, to expand the program to include an on-site educational specialist to tutor struggling students and get them the help they need to truly succeed. “I wrote this grant through the PA Department of Education to become a 21st Century Community Learning Center and we were awarded it to start this year. It’s a five-year grant worth over half a million dollars, so it is allowing us to hire an education specialist to come in and provide a one-on-one tutoring component to assist kids at Edison and East who are performing below basic levels. We are slated to serve

up to 60 kids each year. We are hoping by February at the latest, that we’ll be able to officially launch this program, for which families will need to apply.”

It is very unexpected that a small dance company would have such a broad reach and such a huge potential impact on the local community. This social awareness and the combination of various art mediums have been Dafmark’s goal since the early 1990s. It has only been recently though, through the diligent work of Dennehy and the collaboration with community partners, that they have been able to see the true reach of their work in the community.

Jean-Marc sums it up, “The child is what matters. There is often a distance between getting to that creative problem-solving element in today’s educational system. Here, the entire way of addressing our education is to make problem-solving the focus. You are actually seeing individuals who are taught to be creative, to think for themselves. It’s not sufficient to teach dance or to teach art, it is how you do what you do. With children, it cannot work unless the artist is invested and we are invested.”

*Dafmark is a registered 501c3 non-profit organization and they accept donations to assist their work in the community through the aforementioned programs. Find more information on their website at [dafmarkdance.org](http://dafmarkdance.org)*

*Erin Phillips can be reached at [erin@eriereader.com](mailto:erin@eriereader.com)*



Teaching artist Sarah Howard instructs a student at the Dafmark Creative Arts Center how to use power tools to make art. Howard feels this instruction is empowering, especially for young girls.

CONTRIBUTED



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When sidewalks are left unshoveled, ice accumulates and it becomes **hazardous for children** to walk down the street.

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2022 Best of Erie Winners and Finalists

Your favorite people, places, and things in the Erie area

What is it that makes Erie the best it can be? There are a lot of answers. Among them: our unique geography and the many opportunities for recreation on the lake or in the woods; our artists, musicians, and makers who add depth and beauty to our already beautiful landscape; our unique food and restaurant scene that seems to grow each year, adding eclectic and interesting fare; our locally brewed beer, the wine that makes a drive to North East always worthwhile, and the distilleries bringing imaginative cocktails by the tumbler-full; the businesses that have built their reputation on quality and customer service. Donuts. Pepperoni balls. Waldameer.

We’ve got a lot to be proud of and this year, 2022’s Best of Erie (which brought in over half a million votes, spanning 116 categories) highlights those people, places, and things that truly represent what is best about Erie. That amount of voting indicates that the people of Erie care about showing these local entities that they are supported.

Every year, nominations are open to the public for an extended period of time. This year, via social media, the month of October allowed anyone interested to nominate their favorites prior to the voting going live. Next year will be a landmark year for these awards, so keep on the lookout for the 10th annual Best of Erie Nominations when they open up in early fall of 2023.

And now, without further ado, the winners and finalists of the 2022 Best of Erie Awards, chosen by you!

Runners up listed in order of vote total  
All photography by Jessica Hunter

GOODS AND SERVICES

Best Local Business

Winner: Romolo Chocolates

Runners-up: Odis 12, Bro Man’s Sammi-ches

Best New Business (Within Last Two Years)

Winner: Firestone’s

Runners-up: Bar Ronin, Erie Donut Com-pany

Best Locally Made Product

Winner: Smith Hot Dogs

Runners-up: Mighty Fine Donuts, Romolo Chocolates

Best Car Dealership

Winner: Bianchi Honda

Runners-up: Auto Express KIA / Mazda, New Motors

Best Bank

Winner: Erie Federal Credit Union

Runners-up: PNC Bank, Northwest Bank

Best Antique / Consignment Shop

Winner: The Sassy Peacock

Runners-up: Plato’s Closet, Claudine’s Consignment

Best Boutique

Winner: Grasshopper

Runners-up: Lollie & Co,



The Lavery Brewing Company’s flagship IPA Dulachan is made with Simcoe, Mosaic, and Citra hops and at 5.6 percent abv, it is an inherently drinkable Erie favorite which has earned it the title of Best Locally Made Beer this year.



The winner in a whopping four categories including Best Place for a First Date, Best Place to Take Your Dog, Best Park, and Best Outdoor Adventure Activity, Erie has really shown its love for our most defining geographical element: Presque Isle.

Glass Growers Gallery

Best Jewelry Store

Winner: Dahlkemper’s Jewelry Con-nection

Runners-up: Breakiron Jewelers, Sacred Piercing

Best Furniture Store

Winner: John V. Schultz Furniture & Mattress

Runners-up: Arthur F. Schultz Company, Furniture Row

Best Local Book Store

Winner: Pressed Books & Coffee

Runners-up: Books Galore, Werner Books

Best Barbershop

Winner: Ruiz Barbershop

Runners-up: V’s Barbershop, Colony Bar-ber Shop

Best Spa

Winner: Coventina Day Spa

Runners-up: Panache Salon & Spa, Am-bridge Rose

Best Beauty Salon

Winner: Panache Salon & Spa

Runners-up: Moxi Hair Salon, Coventina Day Spa

Best Dog Groomer

Winner: Paws N Claws

Runners-up: Buzz n’ B’s, Mud Puppies

Best Place to Adopt a Pet

Winner: The ANNA Shelter

Runners-up: Erie Humane Society, Be-cause You Care, Inc.

Best Bike Shop

Winner: 814 Outdoor Sports

Runners-up: John Adams Cycling & Fit-ness,Competitive Gear

Best Auto Repair Shop

Winner: Bonnell’s Collision Center

Runners-up: Bianchi Honda, New Mo-tors

Best Web Developer

Winner: Epic Web Studios

Runners-up: Erie Multimedia, Snowberry Media

Best Graphic Designer

Winner: Sharper Images

Runners-up: Brink Ink, Megan Callaghan

Best Advertising Agency

Winner: R Frank Media

Runners-up: Epic Web Studios, Papa Ad-vertising

Best Law Firm

Winner: MacDonald, Illig, Jones & Brit-ton

Runners-up: Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett, P.C., Quinn Law Firm

Best Real Estate Agency

Winner: Agresti Real Estate Agency







Best General Contractor

Winner: Father and Son Remodeling

Runners-up: Great Lakes Home Solutions, Matt Krol Construction

Best Pet Daycare

Winner: Paws 'n Claws

Runners-up: Peninsula Pups, Buzz n' B's

Best HVAC

Winner: J.J. Agnello Heating & Cooling

Runners-up: Reeves Plumbing and Heating, Nerthling's Heating & Air Conditioning

Best Production Company

Winner: Crew Life Productions

Runners-up: Oddity Productions, Condor Creative

CULTURE & NIGHTLIFE

Best Museum

Winner: Erie Art Museum

Runners-up: ExpERIENCE Children's Museum, Tom Ridge Environmental Center

Best Art Gallery

Winner: Glass Growers Gallery

Runners-up: PACA, City Gallery

Best Community Theatre

Winner: The Erie Playhouse

Runners-up: PACA, Mercyhurst University Theatre Program

Best Dance School

Winner: Long's School of Dance

Runners-up: Little Dance Studio, Erie Dance Theater

Best Photographer

Winner: Katie Mihalak Photography

Runners-up: Lorei Portraits, Mike Conway Photography

Best Visual Artist

Winner: Kaitlyn Page

Runners-up: Mckenzie Sprague, Adam Stempka

Best Band (Original)

Winner: Eric Brewer & Friends

Runners-up: Concrete Castles, Six Year Stretch

Best New Band/Musician

(Last Two Years)

Winner: Elle Taylor

Runners-up: Stoned Apes, Dumpster Garden



Voters this year felt strongly about their love for local animal rescue The ANNA Shelter, voting the organization into first place in an impressive three categories: Best Place to Adopt a Pet, Best Nonprofit, and Best Veterinary Practice.

Best Cover Band

Winner: The Geek Army

Runners-up: First to Eleven, The Groove

Best Vocalist

Winner: Audra Miller

Runners-up: Lindsay Vendetti, Brooke Surgener

Best MC

Winner: CEE Brown

Runners-up: Jonny Evans, Brandi "FRESHCO" Carlini

Best Instrumentalist

Winner: Eric Brewer

Runners-up: Abby Barrett, Zack Orr

# Thank you for voting us Best Winery

A photograph of two bottles of Arundel Cellars wine on a stone surface. One bottle is being poured into a glass. In the foreground, there are some cheese cubes and a bunch of grapes. A circular award badge is visible in the bottom right corner of the image.

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# THANK YOU FOR MAKING 2022 OUR MOST SUCCESSFUL YEAR.

A graphic featuring a colorful sugar skull (Día de los Muertos style) with a wide, toothy grin. The skull is decorated with yellow and red floral patterns. Below the skull, the text 'THE ATACOLYPSE' is written in a stylized, yellow, blocky font with a red outline. A circular award badge is visible in the bottom right corner of the image.

WE WISH YOU ALL A SAFE AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!



BEST OF ERIE



The Victoria Inn, a home turned B&B on Fourth and Peach has remained a downtown constant since 1872. The owners have excelled at this service, bringing them home the win for Best Bed and Breakfast this year (and every year since 2019).

Best DJ

**Winner: Millennium Sound Productions**  
Runners-up: DJ Bill Page, DJ John Gallagher

Best Irish Pub

**Winner: Molly Brannigan's Irish Pub**  
Runners-up: McGarrey's Oakwood Cafe, Sullivan's

**Best Patio**  
**Winner: Oliver's Beer Garden**  
Runners-up: Pier 6 Rooftop Bar,

Rum Runners  
**Best Festival**  
**Winner: Celebrate Erie**  
Runners-up: Peek'n Peak Fall Fest, Erie's Blues & Jazz Festival

**Best Music Series**  
**Winner: 8 Great Tuesdays**  
Runners-up: Sunset Music Series, Erie Philharmonic "In Your Hometown"

FOOD & DRINK

**Best Restaurant**  
**Winner: Pineapple Eddie Southern Bistrotro**  
Runners-up: Federal Hill Smokehouse, Odis 12

**Best New Restaurant (Within Last Two Years)**  
**Winner: Oliver's Rooftop**  
Runners-up: Pier 6 Rooftop Bar & Grill, Bar Ronin

**Best Chef**  
**Winner: Jean Paul (Pineapple Eddie Southern Bistro)**  
Runners-up: Martin Firestone (Firestone's), John Bouquin (The Skunk and

Goat Tavern)  
**Best Bakery**  
**Winner: Art's Bakery**  
Runners-up: Ye Ole Sweet Shoppe, Icing On The Lake

**Best Coffee Shop**  
**Winner: Tippy Bean**  
Runner up: Ember + Forge, Brew Haha at the Colony

**Best Ice Cream Shop**  
**Winner: Straw Hat**  
Runners-up: Whippy Dip, Sara's

**Best Chocolates or Candy**  
**Winner: Romolo Chocolates**  
Runners-up: Stefanelli's Candies, Pulkos Chocolates

**Best Donut Shop**  
**Winner: Mighty Fine Donuts**  
Runners-up: H & K Donut Shop, Erie Donut Factory

**Best Dinor**  
**Winner: Gem City Dinor**  
Runners-up: Flip Cafe, Lawrence Park Dinor

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## BEST OF ERIE



Among those things that make Erie uniquely Erie, Mighty Fine Donuts ranks near the top. A fixture on Parade Street since 1976, most Erie residents feel a strong allegiance to the Mighty Fine brand.

### Best Brunch

**Winner:** Flip Cafe

Runners-up: The Breakfast Place, Gem City Dinor

### Best Brewery

**Winner:** Erie Brewing Company

Runners-up: Voodoo Brewing Company, Lavery Brewing Co

### Best Locally Made Beer

**Winner:** Lavery Brewing Company - Du-lachan

Runners-up: Erie Brewing Company - Rail-bender, Voodoo Brewery - Good Vibes

### Best Winery

**Winner:** Arundel Cellars & Brewing Co

Runners-up: Mazza Vineyards, Heritage Wine Cellars

### Best Distillery

**Winner:** Altered State Distillery

Runners-up: Luminary Distilling,

Erie Distillery

### Best Bar Food

**Winner:** Odis 12

Runners-up: Plymouth Tavern, BIGBAR

### Best Sandwich Shop

**Winner:** Picasso's

Runners-up: Bro Man's Sammiches, Teresa's Italian Deli

### Best Deli

**Winner:** Teresa's Italian Deli

Runners-up: Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meat, Gordon's Butcher & Market

### Best Burger

**Winner:** Bro Man's Sammiches

Runners-up: Odis 12 and Firestone's

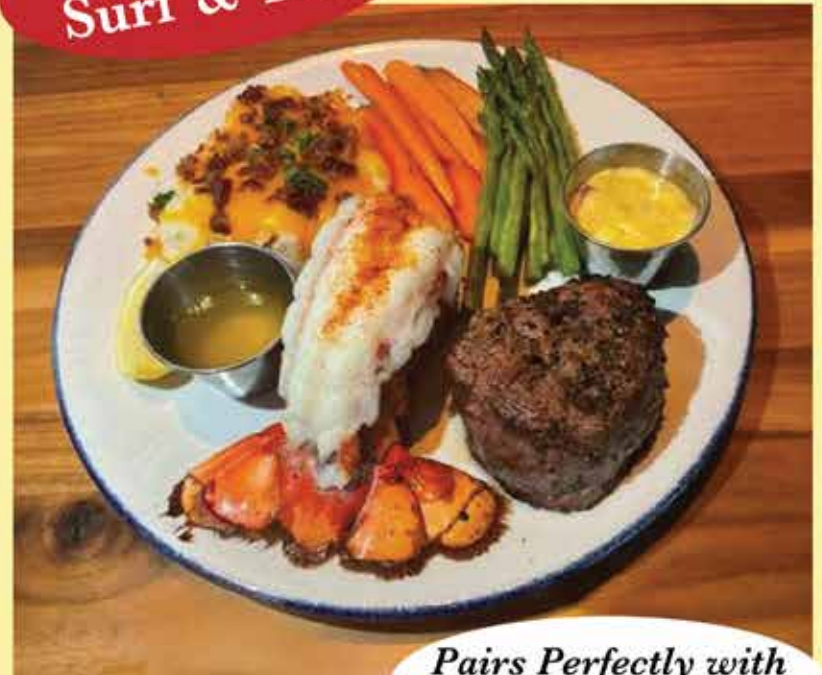
### Best Pizzeria

**Winner:** John's Wildwood Pizza

Runners-up: Valerio's Italian Restaurant & Pizzeria, Sticks & Bricks Wood Fired Pizza

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**BEST OF ERIE**



A staple on 24th and German streets for generations, Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meats has been building a loyal clientele since the 1950s, and has earned the title of Best Neighborhood Grocer for the second year running.

- Best Wings**  
**Winner:** Odis 12  
Runners-up: Park Tavern, One Way Inn

**Best Sushi**  
**Winner:** Samurai Kitchen + Sushi  
Runners-up: Chopstix Express, Ichiban

**Best Food Truck**  
**Winner:** The Atacolypse Food Truck  
Runners-up: Big Cheese Food Truck, The Que Abides

**Best Place for Vegan or Vegetarian Food**  
**Winner:** Erie Food Co-op  
Runners-up: The Juice Jar, Like My Thai

**Best Barbecue Restaurant**  
**Winner:** Federal Hill Smokehouse  
Runners-up: Outlaw Barbecue Revolution, Bro Man’s Sammiches

**Best Seafood Restaurant**  
**Winner:** Pineapple Eddie’s Southern Bistro  
Runners-up: Smugglers’ Wharf, Calamaris Squid Row

**Best Asian Restaurant**  
**Winner:** Samurai Kitchen + Sushi  
Runners-up: Imperial Buffet, Like My Thai

**Best Italian Restaurant**  
**Winner:** Valerio’s Italian Restaurant & Pizzeria  
Runners-up: Mi Scuzi, Colao’s Restaurant
- Best Mexican Restaurant**  
**Winner:** El Canelo  
Runners-up: El Amigo Mexican Grill, Torero’s

**Best Mediterranean or Middle Eastern Restaurant**  
**Winner:** Bistro 26  
Runners-up: Habibi, Casablanca Grill

**Best Caterer**  
**Winner:** Teresa’s Italian Deli  
Runners-up: Cali’s West, Colony Pub & Grille

**Best Waterfront Dining**  
**Winner:** Oliver’s Rooftop  
Runners-up: Pier 6 Rooftop Bar & Grill, Sloppy Duck Saloon

**Best Romantic Restaurant**  
**Winner:** Oliver’s Rooftop  
Runners-up: The Cork 1794, Mi Scuzi

**Best Health Food Store**  
**Winner:** Erie Food Co-op  
Runners-up: Juice Jar, Chicory Hill Herbs

**Best Bar**  
**Winner:** Plymouth Tavern  
Runners-up: BIGBAR, U Pick 6 Tap House

**PEOPLE & PLACES**

**Best Place to Work**  
**Winner:** Erie Insurance  
Runners-up: UPMC Hamot, Erie Humane Society





One of Erie’s more impressive cultural institutions, the Erie Art Museum is a consistent favorite for Best Museum.

**Best Place for a First Date**

**Winner:** Presque Isle State Park  
Runners-up: Oliver’s Rooftop, Erie Otters Hockey

**Best Place to Take Your Dog**

**Winner:** Presque Isle State Park  
Runners-up: Frontier Park, Asbury Woods

**Best Radio Station**

**Winner:** 92.7 Happi  
Runners-up: 103.7 Star 104, 93.9 The Wolf

**Best Radio Personality (or Radio Team)**

**Winner:** Sammy Stone  
Runners-up: Jessica Curry Carlson, Mojo & A.C.

**Best TV Personality**

**Winner:** Tom Atkins  
Runners-up: Sean Lafferty, John Stehlin

**Best Filmmaker**

**Winner:** Jesse James  
Runners-up: John C Lyons, Jake Lydic

**Best Yoga Space**

**Winner:** yogaErie  
Runners-up: Barefoot Buddha, PACA Movement Center

**Best Tattoo Artist**

**Winner:** Garret Ybanez - InkXpressions  
Runners-up: Rachel Travis - Steadfast Tattoo, Jason Dunn - Mid-Town Tattoo

**Best Local Actor**

**Winner:** Brandon Vogt  
Runners-up: Brendan Daugherty, Curtis Jones III

**Best Local Actress**

**Winner:** Adele Crotty  
Runners-up: Krista Perry, Kate Neubert-Lechner

**Best Nonprofit**

**Winner:** The ANNA Shelter  
Runners-up: Erie Zoo, Shriners Hospital Erie

**Best University**

**Winner:** Penn State Behrend  
Runners-up: Gannon University, Mercyhurst University

**Best Fitness Club**

**Winner:** Planet Fitness  
Runners-up: YMCA, Iron Oxygen

**Best Bowling Alley**

**Winner:** Greengarden Lanes  
Runners-up: Eastway Lanes, Rolling

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Thank you to the Erie Reader community for your continued support.

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## BEST OF ERIE



**Winner of Best New Band/Musician** this year goes to up-and-coming singer/songwriter Elle Taylor, who started writing poetry at a young age but only recently began putting those words into song. Her 2021 album *Taken Me A While* features 12 charming songs sure to become some of your favorites.

Meadow Lanes

**Best Team to Root for**

**Winner: Erie Otters**

Runners-up: Erie Seawolves, Erie Roller Derby

**Best Lawyer**

**Winner: Kim Oaks - MacDonald, Illig, Jones & Britton**

Runners-up: Jim Toohey - MacDonald, Illig, Jones & Britton; Chad Vilushis - McCormick & Vilushis

**Best Dentist**

**Winner: Dr. David Demarco**

Runners-up: Beautiful Smiles, Dr. Carla Orlando

**Best Golf Course**

**Winner: Whispering Woods Golf Club**

Runners-up: Mound Grove Golf Course, Peek'n Peak Resort

**Best Real Estate Agent**

**Winner: Sarah O'Neill - Agresti Real Estate**

Runners-up: Cherie Bishop - Keller Williams, Max Rankin - RE/MAX

**Best Local Entrepreneur(s)**

**Winners: Jason and Nicole Lavery - Lavery Brewing Company**

Runners-up: RJ Messenger - Iron Empire, Kyle Bohrer - Gordon's Meat Market

**Best Podcast**

**Winner: Girls Night In**

Runners-up: Our Erie, Idiotville: Erie, PA's Favorite Podcast

**Best Hiking Trails**

**Winner: Wintergreen Gorge**

Runners-up: Asbury Woods, Presque Isle State Park

**Best Park**

**Winner: Presque Isle State Park**

Runners-up: Frontier Park, Asbury Woods

**Best Outdoor Adventure Activity**

**Winner: Presque Isle State Park**

Runners-up: Erie Zoo, Peek'n Peak Mountain Adventures

**Best Wedding Venue**

**Winner: Peek'n Peak**

Runners-up: Port Farms, Nick's Place

**Best Veterinary Practice**

**Winner: The A.N.N.A. Shelter**

Runners-up: Glenwood Pet Hospital, Erie Animal Hospital

**Best Athletic Competition**

**Winner: Barber Beast on the Bay**

Runners-up: Save an Eye Game, Erie Marathon at Presque Isle

**Best Heritage Festival**

**Winner: Zabawa Polish Heritage Festival**

Runners-up: Panegyri Greek Festival, Saint Paul's Italian Festival



CEE Brown, one of the most well-known names in Erie hip-hop, creates songs that are deeply personal, highly poetic, and inherently memorable. He has been voted Best MC this year and every year since 2017.





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Dear Erie,

The past few years have truly been a challenge for us all. Your commitment and support of local restaurants has been remarkable and continues to inspire us.

We are truly grateful and humbled that the community has chosen us as one of Erie's Best. We look forward to great things for the community in this new year and your continued support.

Blessings,

The Pineapple Eddie Team



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# Gem City Style: Best of Erie 2022

A Q&A with Best Local Entrepreneurs of 2022 Jason and Nicole Lavery of Lavery Brewing Company

By: Jessica Hunter

**Jessica Hunter (JH):** Tell us a little bit about Lavery Brewing, what inspired you to become a brewer, and how it all started?

**Nicole Lavery (NL):** Believe it or not, I started enjoying craft beer before Jason and I even met! After we got married, we visited my brother in Michigan, and Jason found a book about homebrewing. He and my brother decided to homebrew a batch and Jason got hooked. I bought him a homebrew kit for his birthday that year and he never stopped. As for getting started: I was interviewing for an occupational therapy position in Limerick, Ireland back in 2008 (we were planning on moving the whole fam). I did not get the position, but Jason and I had already been talking about opening a brewery at some point in our future, so I said let's do it! If we can move our family across an ocean and to a new country, we can open a brewery. And the rest is history.

**Jason Lavery (JL):** Brewing is in my wife's family's blood. Her cousins own two breweries in the region, Voodoo and the Brewerie at Union Station. Nikki's brother Andrew Oleski is an accomplished homebrew/winemaker and got me into the hobby when I was in grad school. Once I got the brewing bug, I decided this was the life for me. I started apprenticing at the Brewerie at Union Station and we haven't looked back.

**JH:** Beer and breweries can define a city. You've been around now for about 14 years. How have you helped define Downtown Erie?

**NL:** In my humble opinion, I believe that we have made Downtown Erie a better community. We recently explored our mission and values statements and determined that community and relationships are our number one values. We believe that people come first, and taking care of each other is a top priority. I believe this is echoed in our team, our customers, and the community as a whole, as Jason and I donate both our time and our money to those in our community that need it.

**JL:** For the past 14 years, we've tried to make beer that is worthy of our hometown. With a mind to the Koehler Brewing past, we've sought to create a brewery that Erieites can be proud of, call their own, and find on tap at almost every bar in town. A lot of people don't realize this, but last year we made over 50,000 gallons of beer and almost every drop stayed in Erie County — we exported a small amount to the UK. Our goal has always been to create beer so good, fresh, and local that tourists feel they have to come to Erie to taste it. With the amount of awards we've won around the country growing every single year since 2013, our goal is accomplished everyday via beer tourism to the region.

**JH:** So I think we all agree that being voted best entrepreneurs has been a long time coming, but as you said, you are also very active in the community. Can you tell us about what you do outside of running an extremely successful brewery?

**NL:** This is a loaded question for me and is a great follow-up to the previous question. On top of being a full-time mother of three kids: Hanna, Donovan, and Meara, I am also a full-time, tenure track professor at



Brewing runs deep in the Lavery's extended family tree, as two of Nicole's cousins tout successful area breweries (Voodoo Brewing Co. and The Brewerie at Union Station) and her brother introduced Jason to the craft. After his first home brewing experience, he was hooked.

Gannon University in the occupational therapy department. When Jason and I first opened, we realized quickly that one of us needed to have "normal" employment for peace of mind, which is why I don't work full-time in the business, but this allows me to pursue my other passions as well. I recently stepped down as chair of the board of L'Arche Erie after nine years, where I also served as vice chair and committee chair of the governance and development committees. L'Arche, which is an organization that assists those with intellectual disabilities, also happens to be the place where Jason and I first met. We both worked there while in college. I am also very active with my state organization for occupational therapy, the Pennsylvania Occupational Therapy Association. I am the commissioner of conference, served as the co-chair of the mental health task force, and sit on the legislation and advocacy committees as well. I am an elected Democratic committee person, co-chair of the Pink Boots Society, which is a women's run organization that focuses on the education of women in the brewing industry, and a member of the Erie Ale Trail. We do all of this on top of running a successful business, trying to maintain life balance, and traveling around the world!

**JL:** Nikki and I both serve on numerous boards and are heavily invested in making this community a better place that future generations can enjoy. I'm on three levels of beer boards (local, state and national) with intentions to make sure Erie and Pennsylvania are always at the table when decisions are made. My current board service includes: vice president of the Brewers of Pennsylvania, legislative chair of the Brewers of PA,

secretary of the Lake Erie Ale Trail, Brewers Association Brewpub committee co-chair and Government Affairs committee member, and Montessori Regional Charter School Board of Trustees.

**JH:** We've heard the exciting news for the expansion of Lavery Brewing. Can you share some details for the project and what this means for the future of the brewpub?

**JL:** It will be a game changer. We built our current pub back in 2013 and so much has changed for us. Not many businesses get opportunities to expand and remake their public spaces like this. Our plans include a longer and more efficient bar, an exposed kitchen with new equipment, new signage, and a complete rethinking of how we use the pub. We will have lots of cozy spaces as well as even more standing bars where people can gather, set down a beer, and snack on some delicious tacos.

**JH:** If you were a beer, what style of beer would you be and what would you call yourself?

**NL:** This is a tough question. I would probably be a Belgian Tripel, which is a complex, mildly spicy, but approachable beer. It could be called Gold and Bold! I think those that know me would agree.

**JL:** I'm obsessed with my family's Northern Irish heritage so I'd probably be a stout. I'd call myself New Ulster Stout — New Ulster was almost the name of Lavery Brewing when we were dreaming this up back in 2009.

For more information on Lavery Brewing Company, their beer, menu, and building, visit: [laverybrewing.com](http://laverybrewing.com)


Jessica Hunter can be found at [jessicahunterphotos.com](http://jessicahunterphotos.com)





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# OpenedEyes and Culturally Conscious

Growing organization promotes self-awareness, inclusion, and diversity

By: Amy VanScoter

When Brandon Wiley first came up with the idea for OpenedEyes back in 2014, it started as a dream. “I was finishing up graduate school at Gannon University and I literally had a dream about writing a book. The book was called *What Are You — A Journey to Self Discovery*, said Wiley. “When I woke up I was thinking why would I write a book and call it the question I hated the most, the question that caused so much pain for me? And after much reflection, what came to me was that I needed to let go and stop giving that question so much power over me, I needed to reframe its meaning.”

That question, “What are you?” was first spoken to Wiley during the sixth grade at Our Lady of Fatima School in Farrell, Pa. He tells stories of growing up being of mixed race and how these early experiences led to feelings of isolation and deep depression. But many years later, this same question, and those experiences, would become the basis for OpenedEyes, a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to educating and training in the areas of self-development, diversity, and inclusion. OpenedEyes promotes (at-times painful) introspection as a path toward greater self-awareness of problematic attitudes and behaviors, and as a springboard toward uncomfortable but meaningful conversations with perceived “others.”

Practicing inclusion helped to create the growing organization. “I was talking to a friend and he said we should take the book idea and turn it into a leadership program, so I called people I knew in business and education for some support,” said Wiley. “But what really teetered it over was the Trayvon Martin situation,” said Wiley. “I said, OK, I definitely need to do this because there’s a significant disconnect in communication that we have as people and it’s literally impacting everything and I’ve known about this issue since I was born, so that’s when we started building the concepts and curriculum.”

Wiley began to see the question in a more empowering perspective. “‘What are you?’ is more of a self-reflective concept, it’s about challenging ourselves entirely and asking ourselves how do we identify — and it’s not about sexuality or race, but who are we, what are we, what are we made of, what does it mean to be a human being, to fulfill those basic human needs, and to reach self actualization, because we are always in a constant state of growth,” said Wiley.

Although the idea for the organization initially came about because of his own personal struggles, Wiley believes this could be the conduit or bridge to help more people find themselves. “It’s not just about race, although my story is about race. But OpenedEyes has really evolved into a more humanistic organization — ageism, ableism, mental health, trauma, how to work cohesively — because diversity is part of everyday life,” said Wiley. “How to communicate effectively, what does it mean to be an active listener; those are skills. That’s the culture we are trying to



Wiley's creation of OpenedEyes was inspired by a literal dream, in which he conceptualized the answer to a question that has plagued him his whole life: "What are you?"

create.”

“OpenedEyes has culturally conscious conversations; it’s not a training where you just check a box to say you’ve done it. It’s about personalizing people’s emotions and digging into your story, because everyone has a story. So what OpenedEyes has evolved into is that force that creates an environment that even though the conversation might be uncomfortable, it’s needed. We’ve had people shed tears, and open up about things in front of their coworkers they never thought they would. It’s a beautiful thing,” said Wiley.

Wiley says what’s most unique about the organization is how they talk about diversity from a mindfulness-based standpoint in regard to culture and organizational DE&I (diversity, equity, and inclusion). This past year alone, OpenedEyes has not only worked locally with organizations like Erie Insurance and the Erie Chamber of Commerce, but they have expanded their reach into Pittsburgh, worked with 160 school counselors in the Columbus City School District in Ohio, and presented in Texas to more than 200 medical professionals. They also participate in the NWP State Education Association training, where they

present on a different topic every month to representatives from more than 50 school districts in NWP.

Wiley, a licensed professional counselor, has partnerships and collaborations with dozens of local businesses and organizations (not to mention a spot in the 2016 class of Erie’s 40 Under 40). His nonprofit has also worked with the NWP Area Labor Federation, Erie County PA, the City of Erie Police, Erie Coalition for a Trauma Informed Community, PA Cyber, Americorps Vista, Farrell and Mercyhurst Prep high schools, and Edinboro, Gannon, Slippery Rock, and Penn State universities.

Recently, Wiley was awarded the Erie Spirit Award from the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership. “I was super excited about it and how they were talking about how OpenedEyes was contributing to our community. I’ve always wanted to create something that was effective and that people actually found value in,” said Wiley. “I want to help foster change. We are consulting with people, we are trying to identify the gaps, we are doing needs assessments, post assessments, post follow-up consultations, recommendations, next steps for the company or school





Brandon Wiley (left) and Shannon Stewart are both licensed clinical mental health counselors for OpenedEyes, a nonprofit dedicated to education in the areas of self-development, diversity, and inclusion.

district, and providing all of the information necessary because we want to set people up to succeed. We are invested in creating that culture of change.”

The organization is also expanding Lens, their youth program that focuses on perception, prejudice, active listening, and resiliency. “We created the program two years ago for PA Cyber. We’re going to be doing a lot more youth programs this year with the Erie School District,” said Wiley. “I want to create that culture of connectedness and interconnectedness and pass that onto the next generation. Diversity is not just race or identity, it’s everything. I want to take diversity out of the box we put it in and put it more on a universal basis. We are giving people an opportunity to be uncomfortable but to be comfortable being uncomfortable,” said Wiley.

“If we can create a culture where we can find that element of healthy communication with each other, then we will advance the community, and the community will grow. There’s not one person or organization that is going to do it all. We have to work cohesively. And that’s what I want for the Erie community and beyond.”

OpenedEyes can be found on Facebook at [facebook.com/openedeyesnonprofit](https://facebook.com/openedeyesnonprofit), on Instagram @ [oe\\_whatru](https://www.instagram.com/oe_whatru) and their website: [opened-eyes.com](https://opened-eyes.com)

Amy VanScoter can be reached at [avanscoter@gmail.com](mailto:avanscoter@gmail.com)

CONTRIBUTED

## WHAT DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LOOK LIKE?

*It looks a lot like me.*

**MARY TIMASHENKA**

Media consultant,  
community activist,  
survivor.

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Downtown Art Brunch: A Taste of Erie Art

Galleries collaborate over brunch to bring people to the Downtown Erie art scene

SATURDAY, JAN. 14

What pairs well with appetizers, snacks, and drinks such as coffee or mimosas? How about beautiful local art and music? The Downtown Art Brunch event is a collaboration between four downtown galleries including 1020 Collective, City Gallery, D’ Hopkins Denniston Gallery, and Glass Growers Gallery.

The galleries will serve up brunch refreshments and live music while you peruse the art exhibits. All galleries are within walking distance of each other, so one has the chance to experience the variety of food and art that each gallery has to offer. The artwork on display at each of the galleries is largely for sale, so you might just find that one piece that speaks to you and give it a forever home. However, if you simply come for the hors d’oeuvres and ambiance, that’s okay too.

Stephen Trohoske, co-owner of City Gallery said that “although each gallery has something different to offer, the collaboration is a great way to bring the community together to appreciate art and the artists in all the galleries. We want the community to come to appreciate art, the artists, and to help em-



Patrons of the Downtown Art Brunch will be able to browse the local art on display at four different galleries throughout Downtown Erie, while enjoying brunch refreshments at each venue.

brace the arts into their lives.”

The galleries involved are planning to hold the brunch event on the second Saturday of each month so if you miss one, there will be plenty of chances to get your local art fix. — Michael Hull

11 a.m. to 2 p.m. // City Gallery at 1503 State St., Glass Growers Gallery at 10 E. 5th St., D’ Hopkins Denniston Gallery at 5 W. 10th St., and 1020 Collective at 1020 Holland St. // facebook.com/citygalleryerie/events

Find the ‘Order Out of Chaos’

Diane Fleisch Hughes’ Cummings Gallery Exhibition

OPENS MONDAY, JAN. 16

The COVID-19 pandemic created or exacerbated a number of mental health issues, and it was upon therapists, many of whom had to pivot to telehealth services, that the struggling public came to rely.

Cleveland-based artist, art therapist, and counselor Diane Fleisch Hughes turned that “chaos” into what’s known as response art — art that is created with the purpose of expressing the therapist’s knowledge and understanding of their client, and which allows them to, in Hughes’ own words, “share their experiences with others.”

Using different media (past works have included watercolor, acrylic and even spray paint) to create collages that “portray the emotional state of her subject and the environment in which they find themselves,” Hughes’ response art will be on display in the Mercyhurst University Cummings Art Gallery from Monday, Jan. 16 through Tuesday, Feb. 21.

Additionally, there will be a special reception on Thursday, Jan. 26 from 5 to 7 p.m. to celebrate the exhibition and its artist. The Cummings Art Gallery is in the lobby of the Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center, and the exhibit is open



Artist Diane Fleisch Hughes presents her work, which attempts to capture the chaos of therapists and their clients dealing with various mental health issues, at Mercyhurst University’s Cummings Art Gallery through February.

— and free to the public — from noon to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. — Cara Suppa

Noon to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, with a special reception from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Jan. 26 // 501 E. 38th St. // Free // miac.mercyhurst.edu

Have a Hoot at Presque Isle Owl Campfire

Learn about native owl species from those “who” are in the know

THURSDAY, JAN. 19

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PA-DCNR) is hosting a free event open to folks of all ages to learn about native owl species in Erie, specifically those living on Presque Isle. Join park environmental educators at the Rotary Pavilion on Presque Isle State Park for a cozy, indoor campfire and learn about the eight different species of owl that call Erie home.

During the event, participants will learn all about owls through different visual aids including video footage shot by park employees themselves. Environmental educator Brian Gula notes, “During COVID, we did a lot of virtual programming, and with our funding we were able to get some nice equipment to go out and showcase the park, to get kids to the park through the screen. So we were really able to capture what we see in the park every day. We have shot footage of eight different native species of owl, from the smallest owl called the saw

whet to the largest which is the great horned owl.” There will also be multiple taxidermy mounts for attendees to examine up close, allowing the opportunity to see different colorations, special features, and adaptations that make each owl species unique.

During the program, there will also be an opportunity to learn about local owls through their diet as participants in the class will get to dissect owl pellets in search of small animal bones. Owls are only able to digest the soft tissues of their prey; what remains (the bones, teeth, scales, fur, etc.) is regurgitated as pellets. Being able to observe what a particular owl ate helps one learn more about the habitat in which the owl resides. Rest assured, all dissectable owl pellets have been run through an autoclave and are totally sanitized and safe to handle.

Learning about your local environment has as much to do with environmental discovery as it does self-discovery, es-



The call of the barred owl, which lives in Pennsylvania year round, follows the cadence of: “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?” Learn about these owls and more native Pa. owl species at Presque Isle’s Hoots campfire event.

pecially for young children. Gula notes, “The more that you come to understand how valuable these natural resources are, the more your perspective changes, and you really begin to feel for that natural resource. That feeling will hopefully inspire someone to become a steward of the environment, or perhaps even spark someone to embrace a career, as that’s how I started.” PA-DCNR hosts a num-

ber of free or very low cost educational events throughout the year for participants of all ages, so be sure to check their online schedule regularly. — Erin Phillips

6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. // Rotary Pavilion at Presque Isle State Park, 1 Peninsula Dr. // Free // All ages welcome // Registration required by Jan. 17 // events.dcnr.pa.gov/presque\_isle\_state\_park



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JEFF FETTERMAN BAND

FRIDAY JAN 20  
TOUCH OF GREY TRIO

SATURDAY JAN 21  
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## As I Am

Art exhibit to showcase talents of LGBTQIA+ youth in Behrend's Kochel Center

By: Matt Swanseger

More existence should not be a crime. Yet for those who count themselves amongst the LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual) population, it historically *has* been — and in many places around the world *continues* to be. Age-old paradigms of gender and sexuality, specifically that of heteronormativity — a view that only relations between cisgender men and women (i.e. those whose biological sex at birth and gender identities are in alignment) are “correct” — have spurred centuries of misunderstanding and persecution, which only very recently have begun to be redressed.

Here in the United States, it was only in 1982 that Wisconsin became the first state to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation, and only within the past two decades that gay marriage was first legally recognized (first by Massachusetts in 2004, then nationwide in 2015 following the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*). Legal progress, although steady, has been slow — and seems increasingly tenuous since the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in June 2021.

Despite the gradual shift in public attitudes surrounding gender and sexuality, acceptance remains an ongoing battle. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) predicts that mental health conditions are more than twice as prevalent among cisgendered LGB adults — and nearly *four* times more widespread among transgender individuals — compared to cisgendered heterosexuals. At the root of this mental health epidemic is rejection and trauma — often perpetrated by those closest to them — and it manifests in a greater risk of substance abuse, homelessness, and suicide throughout the LGBTQIA+ community.

Similarly, the rate of depression among cisgender LGB youth is double that of their heterosexual peers — and for transgender youth, the incidence of depressive and suicidal thoughts is nearly *quadruple*. In a 2019 survey, 86 percent of LGBTQ respondents reported harassment or assault at school. The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health suggests there is not much reprieve at home either — just 37 percent of the respondents felt theirs was a “LGBTQ-affirming space.”

These trends have led many LGBTQIA+ individuals to seek validation elsewhere. Recently founded by Dr. Tyler Titus, the queer youth advocacy group Compton's Table is one such organization committed to this cause, working “to create a thriving queer community in Northwest Pennsylvania through connecting peers and empowering queer youth and young adults to be agents of sustainable change,” according to their mission statement.

Volunteer Wren Genua elaborates: “Compton's Table is very keen on creating spaces that are as inclusive as possible. We focus on making the youth feel seen, heard, and safe in an environment where they are free to express themselves.”

For many years, the arts have served as both a refuge



CONTRIBUTED

**Two examples of the work hanging in the show *As I Am* on display in the upper hallway of the Kochel Center at Penn State Erie. The artwork displayed is an eclectic collection of work in a variety of media, touching on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth.**

and an outlet for marginalized groups, giving them the room to explore the intricacies surrounding identity. “Art is empowerment to anyone, but especially to the LGBTQ+ community. We’ve expressed ourselves through art for decades — whether it be through dance, fashion, makeup, paint, or any other medium. Art is empowering because it allows people to create using feelings. It lets the youth be free and get out their thoughts and feelings in a constructive and healing way,” says Genua.

Michael Mahler, editor-in-chief of Erie Gay News (EGN), has felt the relationship between the arts and LGBTQIA+ communities only grow stronger since his publication's founding 30 years ago. He mentions the uptick in submissions to the Greater Erie Alliance for Equality's juried art shows, as well as Dramashop's recent production of *The Crumple Zone* as prime examples. “The play is gay-themed, and one of the actors mentioned in the printed program that he was proud as an openly gay man to be playing an openly gay character. I recall earlier plays that were LGBTQIA+ themed, but I don't remember performers being as likely to explicitly reveal that they were LGBTQIA+.”

At EGN, Mahler has observed the media's power to promote visibility, furthering the impact of art and artists. He says small, independent outfits such as EGN and the Erie Reader are especially equipped to “help

spread the word about art centering around historically marginalized people by not only providing coverage of art shows and performances that feature those communities, but also in other ways by serving as a record.”

And so for the record, here is another — opening on Friday, Jan. 19 in Penn State Behrend's Irving Kochel Center (home of its Humanities and Social Sciences department), the *As I Am* exhibit will showcase the works of LGBTQIA+ artists between the ages of 10 and 25. Other than a prohibition against three-dimensional works (due to space constraints and imagery that would be inappropriate for a highly utilized public space (“relatively PG-13” in Genua's words), the guidelines for submission are pretty open.

“We are looking for LGBTQ+ youth to express themselves as they see fit. For some of them it looks like self portraits, and for others it could be abstract. Being young and queer comes with many challenges and emotions, and we just want to allow the youth to use this as a chance to fully express themselves through art,” explains Genua.

Acceptable media include paintings, drawings, photographs, collages, and brief films or videos. Curating the show will be Dan Schank, an associate teaching professor of English and art at Penn State Behrend (and longtime Reader contributor), who initially reached out to Compton's Table about the collaboration.





LEONID IASTREMSKYI

The *As I Am* art exhibition, presented by the Behrend College and Compton's Table, features artwork made by young people in Erie's LGBTQIA+ community.

They were only too eager to oblige. "Community is found through common goals, purpose, and passions. Art connects the youth in this way — it helps them find like-minded people who are rooting for them. To find a community that you fit into opens up the opportunity for value, affirmation, and the feeling of being seen," says Genua.

**"Art is empowering because it allows people to create using feelings. It lets the youth be free and get out their thoughts and feelings in a constructive and healing way." ~ Wren Genua of the queer youth advocacy group Compton's Table**

As of now, this event will not be recurring, but there are two key dates to pay attention to throughout the duration of the exhibition — the opening reception on Jan. 19 (5 to 7 p.m.) and a panel discussion on Monday, Feb. 20 (World Day of Social Justice) in partnership with Behrend's GASE Club highlighting queer voices of color (time TBD). The exhibition ends on Friday, Feb. 24.

"For Compton's Table, we plan to continue being a place where the youth can feel safe to create art and anything else they may need," asserts Genua.

Most importantly, to be — as they are, who they are.

Friday, Jan. 19 through Friday, Feb. 24 // Irvin Kochel Center at Penn State Behrend, 4701 College Drive // [behrend.psu.edu](mailto:behrend.psu.edu)

Entries for *As I Am* will be accepted through Friday, Jan. 13 and can be submitted digitally to Professor Dan Schank ([dcs35@psu.edu](mailto:dcs35@psu.edu)) and through the Compton's Table website ([comptonstable.org/upcoming-events](http://comptonstable.org/upcoming-events)) OR physically at the Penn State Behrend Art House (Room 101) or Humanities and Social Sciences Office (170 Kochel). For digital submissions, please include information about the title, materials, and dimensions of the piece(s).

Follow and support Compton's Table on Facebook and Instagram.

## Erie Restaurant Week Celebrates Third Year

A delectable diversion for area foodies



JESSICA HUNTER PHOTOGRAPHY

BEGINS FRIDAY, JAN. 20

With the holidays winding down and temperatures staying low, many of us may be experiencing a bit of a burnout, especially when it comes to meals (there really are only so many ways you can repurpose turkey into new dishes). January is a time of new beginnings, and what better way to celebrate that than by supporting local business and having dinner taken care of for you in the process?

Erie Restaurant Week is returning for its third year, running January 20 - 29. With a record number of 39 participants this time around, the event will showcase all the delectable options Erie restaurants have to offer.

Started in 2021 by VisitErie, Restaurant Week was created as a way to not only highlight the diverse restaurants of the area, but to also help support them during the pandemic, an unprecedented time across all industries. As key components to Erie's tourism success, it was imperative to help keep these businesses thriving during that difficult time.

Chris Temple, director of communications for VisitErie, loves how the event supports local restaurants: "My favorite part is seeing the excitement that the event brings to the community and our participating restaurants each year. With such a diverse mix taking part this year, Erie Restaurant Week is a great way to show your support for Erie's fantastic restaurants."

While many familiar restaurants are returning to this year's roster, there are also many new spots joining the celebration: all nine vendors at the Flagship City Food Hall, Bricks at the Cashier's House, The Dinor at Lawrence Park, Federal Hill Smokehouse, Storming Crab, Erie Ale Works, Julius, and Samurai Kitchen & Sushi are all set to make their Erie Restaurant Week debut this year.

Each participating restaurant will have a special menu and pricing designed specifically for the event, with many offering dine in, carry out, or pickup options, making it easier than ever to support local business while enjoying the unique dining experiences they offer.

"This is VisitErie's third Erie Restaurant Week and it's looking to be our largest one yet," said VisitErie President and CEO John Oliver. "January is typically a slower month for restaurants and Erie Restaurant Week gives them a nice boost. With 39 restaurants participating this year, people have more options to get out and show their support." —Ally Kutz

Make it a point to support local restaurants during Restaurant Week. The delectable local fare shown here are available at (from left) The Cork 1794, U Pick 6 Taphouse, Bayhouse Oyster Bar & Restaurant, and Noodlelove.

Full list of participating restaurants (alphabetical):

- The Bayfront Grille (Sheraton Hotel, 55 W. Bay Rd.)
- Bay House Oyster Bar & Restaurant (6 Sassafras Pier)
- The Brewerrie at Union Station (123 W. 14th St.)
- Bricks at Cashier's House (417 State St.)
- Calamari's Squid Row (1317 State St.)
- The Cork 1794 (900 W. Erie Plaza Dr.)
- The Dinor at Lawrence Park (4019 Main St.)
- Donato's Pizza (4829 Buffalo Rd., 1535 W. 8th St. Suite A1, 861 E. 38th St.)
- Erie Ale Works (416 W. 12th St.)
- Federal Hill Smokehouse (2609 Peach St.)
- Firebirds Wood Fired Grill (680 Millcreek Mall Blvd.)
- Flagship City Food Hall including Dina's Authentic Dominican Kitchen, Jo's Brooklyn Bagel Too, Noodlelove, North Row Philly, Perry's Pizza, Shawarma Station, The Straw Hat, Taste & See Fruit & Veggie Bar, and Taste of Love (22 N. Park Row)
- John Russell Brewing Company (7520 Peach St. #101)
- Julius (1607 State St.)
- Lavery Brewing (128 W. 12th St.)
- Luminary Distilling, Fuhrman's Cider, Eatery (8270 Peach St.)
- Molly Brannigan's Irish Pub (506 State St.)\*
- Pineapple Eddie Southern Bistro (1402 W. 10th St.)
- The Plymouth Tavern (1109 State St.)
- Riverside Brewing Company (1 Fountain St., Cambridge Springs)
- Samurai Kitchen & Sushi (2767 W. 12th St.)
- The Skunk & Goat Tavern (17 W. Main St., North East)
- Storming Crab (7791 Peach St.)
- Syd's Place (2992 W. Lake Rd.)
- Twisted Elk Brewery (10139 W. Lake Rd., Lake City)
- U Pick 6 Harbor House (4454 Buffalo Rd.)
- U Pick 6 Public House (4574 W. Ridge Rd.)
- U Pick 6 Tap House (333 State St. #110)
- Voodoo Brewery Erie (101 Boston Store Pl.)

Please note: at time of publication, we are aware of Molly Brannigan's temporary closing; however, we wanted to include them in the list as they were originally slated to participate and we are hopeful that they will be able to open in time for Erie Restaurant Week. For the most up to date information on their situation, please visit their website.



# KNOX LAW WELCOMES BOUTROS IMAD



**Boutros Imad** is a new associate with Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett, P.C.

Boutros concentrates his practice on estate planning, trust planning, estate administration, and business and tax matters. He helps clients with a variety of asset protection needs, including simple estate plans, multigenerational

trusts, complex estate plans, business succession, and more. He has previous legal experience as a judicial intern at the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania, and also as a legal intern for the Lebanese Parliament in Beirut.

Originally from Lebanon, he graduated with honors from the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik with an LL.B. degree. He became interested in the U.S. legal system and moved to Pittsburgh to enroll in the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, where he earned his LL.M. in 2020 (cum laude) and his J.D. in 2022 (cum laude). He is fluent in both Arabic and French.

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## EVENTS

### 'Try To Remember' A Time Without *The Fantasticks*

The world's longest running musical finds new audience at PACA

**PREMIERES FRIDAY, JAN. 27**

*The Fantasticks* may have been written in the 1960s, but the musical's familiar love story has continued to connect with audiences through the decades. *The Fantasticks* originally premiered at a small off-Broadway theater in 1960 and ran uninterrupted for 42 years with over 17,000 performances before it closed in 2002, giving the play the title of the longest-running uninterrupted show of any kind in the United States and the world's longest running musical. This play is timeless, as proven by its sustained popularity, and this month it's coming to the stage at PACA to connect with audiences once again.

Director Bob Martin is excited to present the show at PACA, specifically because of the scale of the performance space: "It's a small, intimate show, and the PACA stage is the perfect place for an audience to get swept up in this eight-character musical. The cast includes actors who have loved the show for years and some who have just been introduced to it. From the very first rehearsal the cast was engaged by the simple brilliance of the show." The cast is composed of some Erie performance gold including: Joe Greulich, Molly Parks, Isaiah Aldridge, Michael Meyer, Dan Bainbridge, Rosie Hitt, Jordan Gilmore, and Chris Pedersen.

The musical presents a young couple, united through a trick played by each of their fathers, who initially find young love, then drift apart, and eventually come back together into a more mature



M. HARRISON PHOTOGRAPHY

**Lead performers Molly Parks and Isaiah Aldridge bring new life to the characters of Louisa and Matt in the timeless love story *The Fantasticks*, coming to the PACA stage for seven shows in January and February.**

version of their earlier love. According to the narrator El Gallo, "without a hurt, the heart is hollow." These are themes that can transcend any cultural barrier and connect to any audience.

Composer Harvey Schmidt once reflected on the show's enduring popularity: "People can take it on many different levels. Children love it. To them, it's just like a fairy tale. But there are so many different levels for many different people. For very sophisticated people, there are a lot of witty inside references, both theatrical and literary, that they can appreciate." — Erin Phillips

7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays through Feb. 11 // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$15 // For ticket information, please visit [paca1505.org](http://paca1505.org)

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Erie Philharmonic Premieres Holst’s *The Planets* for New Year

Gustav Holst’s orchestral suite showcases strength and majesty of the heavens

SATURDAY, JAN. 28

The Erie Philharmonic’s Symphonic Series is back in 2023 with Gustav Holst’s *The Planets*, an interstellar selection preceded by *Sidereus* from Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov, and Astor Piazzolla’s “Aconcagua: Concerto for Bandoneon and Orchestra” featuring accordionist Hanzhi Wang in her debut with the Phil.

Regarding *The Planets*, the Erie Philharmonic explains: “Each movement of the work is a tone poem inspired by the personalities of the gods after which each planet is named. In music that has deeply influenced sci-fi composers like John Williams, *The Planets* stand as an epic journey through our solar system that is as fascinating as it is awe-inspiring.”

Holst, who wrote the seven-movement orchestral suite between 1914 and 1916, took inspiration from astrology in the composition and naming of the pieces, with titles such as “Mars, The Bringer of

War” and “Jupiter, The Bringer of Jollity.” Although various movements were first performed between September 1918 and early 1920, the first public performance of the complete suite was on Nov. 15, 1920 by the London Symphony Orchestra at Queen’s Hall.

The concert also features the works of Argentinian composers Osvaldo Golijov and Astor Piazzolla, a unique pairing as Golijov paid tribute to Piazzolla in his piece *Last Round*, written after Piazzolla’s death in 1992. Golijov, currently composer-in-residence at The College of the Holy Cross and frequent collaborator of filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola, was commissioned to write *Sidereus* to honor Henry Fogul, a former president of the League of American Orchestras, for its premiere in 2010 with the Memphis Symphony Orchestra.

Accordionist Hanzhi Wang, the First Prize Winner of the 2017 Young Concert Artists International Audition, has performed at venues such as Carnegie Hall



VADIM SADOVSKI

The Erie Philharmonic brings the awe-inspiring majesty of Gustav Holst’s *The Planets* to the Warner Theatre stage, presenting this symphony alongside two other astronomical works while also featuring the talents of accomplished accordionist Hanzhi Wang.

and Kennedy Center, and received critical acclaim at the 40th Castelfidardo International Accordion Competition in Italy. Wang has taught and performed all over the world, with performances and master’s classes at the Manhattan School of Music, Royal Danish Academy of Music, and Tianjin Music Conservato-

ry along with serving on juries for accordion competitions in Rome and Portugal. She studied at the China Conservatory of Music and the Royal Danish Academy of Music for her undergraduate and graduate studies. — Thomas Taylor

8 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$12-\$56 // [eriephil.org](http://eriephil.org)

Mania The ABBA Tribute Comes To The Warner

A night for all you dancing queens

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 1

Break out the sequin suits and the platform boots because the songs from Swedish supergroup ABBA are coming to the Warner Theatre. Mania The ABBA Tribute (formally ABBA Mania) are an internationally touring tribute act that have been performing the music of ABBA since 1999. Their live performances include a full stage show with costume changes, lighting, and effects, taking you back to the time of disco balls, bell bottoms, and feathered hair.

ABBA originally went on hiatus in 1982, even though there wasn’t an official announcement of a break or an end to the group; their dissolution is considered to have happened after ABBA’s last public performance on Dec. 11, 1982. ABBA’s last world tour was between 1979 and 1980, where they performed 52 shows in 40 cities across 13 countries. They have only recently returned as live avatars in *ABBA Voyage*, an immersive live digital concert performance with visuals by George Lucas’ company, Industrial Light & Magic.

Over the years their music has solidified ABBA as pop royalty, with their songs being used on singing programs, commercials, not to mention the hit mu-



MANIA THE ABBA TRIBUTE

Mania The ABBA Tribute brings all your favorite ABBA hits to the Warner Theatre stage. Get ready to tap into your inner Dancing Queen, as the spectacle of the disco era takes center stage.

sical and film *Mama Mia*, which was inspired by the songs of ABBA. Mania The ABBA Tribute brings you two hours of ABBA’s hit songs and a few fan-favorites as well. Songs like their breakthrough hits “Waterloo,” “Fernando,” “Take A Chance On Me,” “The Winner Takes It All,” “Mama Mia,” and “Dancing Queen” are performed with utmost respect to the source material. — Larry Wheaton

7:30 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$51.75 plus fees // [erieevents.com](http://erieevents.com)

Dramashop’s *Incognito*

A thought-provoking exploration of love, memory, identity, and illusion

PREMIERING FRIDAY, FEB. 3

If you have ever wondered what happened to Einstein’s brain after he died, what happens if part of our brain goes missing, or how it is to be in a relationship with brains at the focus, this is the show for you. As one of the character’s says, “The brain is a storytelling machine, desperate to glean meaning.” *Incognito*, written by Nick Payne, the acclaimed writer of the sold-out Broadway sensation *Constellations*, premieres on the Dramashop mainstage this February.

Four actors play a combined 21 characters within *Incognito*’s three interwoven stories. A pathologist steals the brain of Albert Einstein, a neuropsychologist embarks on her first romance with another woman, and a seizure patient forgets everything except how much he loves his girlfriend. *Incognito* braids these mysterious stories into one show that asks whether memory and identity are nothing but illusions.

This production marks Zach Hoffman’s directorial debut for the Dramashop mainstage. He describes the show as “the perfect storm of talent in all areas.” The show is double cast with both returning Dramashop performers and new performers like Roland Robinson

and Chris Smith. Some veteran cast members include: Britney Shaw (*Everybody*), Maeve Kirby (*Eurydice*), Howard Lang (*Crumple Zone*), and Kara Headley (Dramashop Shorts Festival), along with performers who have not been seen on the Dramashop stage in a while like Nora Schillinger (*Natural Shocks*) and JJ Theisien (*King Charles III*).

“This show for the performers is truly a magic act,” said Hoffman. “They are switching between characters very quickly and are fully committed to bringing the magic to the audience. This show is also double cast. We had so many wonderful performers that it just felt like the right move. Each performer brings a very different version of the character than the person with whom they double.”

Dramashop aims to produce works that challenge the audience and promote discussion long after the night is over. “This production is thought-provoking, smart, witty, alluring, and magical,” said Hoffman. — Amy VanScoter

Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m. through Feb. 19 // Tickets are half price opening weekend // 1001 State Street, Suite 210 // For tickets and more information visit: [dramashop.org](http://dramashop.org)





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This Time It's War

Avatar: The Way of Water is just as beautiful and hollow as its predecessor

★★★

James Cameron has quite a reputation making sequels that many consider better than the original. Both *Aliens* and *Terminator 2* frequently top lists of sequels that are a noted improvement on the films they followed (a sentiment I don't particularly agree with), so expectations are high when he makes possibly the most anticipated sequel ever. After 13 long years, *Avatar: The Way of Water* hits theaters and much like the original, it is a feast for the senses but doesn't leave much for the mind to chew on.

More than a decade after the humans were kicked off of Pandora, Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) has fully integrated with the Na'vi and is raising a family with his mate Neytiri (Zoe Saldana). However, when the Earth military comes back to Pandora along with an old adversary (Stephen Lang) bent on colonizing the planet, Jake and his family must go into hiding amongst a seafaring tribe and must learn their ways in order to survive.

Much like the original, this film is visually dazzling, succeeding in making Pandora look both uniquely alien and invitingly familiar. That said, the high frame rate gives every movement a kind of unnatural fluidity making us feel less like "I am there" and more "I am playing a video game." Also, after getting over the initial awe of the scenery, the story of naturalistic forces versus greed and exploitation doesn't leave much food for thought. This colorful world has a very black-and-white sense of mo-



reality that can't sustain interest through the gargantuan runtime. The spectacle, awe-inspiring as it is, is only surface level. We can peek through the visual splendor into the shallowness of Cameron's vision. — Forest Taylor

Directed by James Cameron // Written by James Cameron, Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver // Starring Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Sigourney Weaver, Stephen Lang, Cliff Curtis, Joel David Moore, CCH Pounder, Edie Falco, Brendan Cowell, Jamie Flatters, Britain Dalton, Trinity Bliss, Jack Champion, Jemaine Clement, and Kate Winslet // 192 minutes // Rated PG-13 // 20th Century Studios

Life At 24 Frames Per Second

The Fabelmans is Spielberg at his most personal

★★★★★

It's no big revelation to say that Steven Spielberg has incorporated his own childhood into his films. The breakup of family is a theme that has dominated films as varied as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *E.T.*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, and *Catch Me If You Can*. But with *The Fabelmans* Spielberg uses his own childhood as the main inspiration for a story. What could easily be a self-indulgent bit of myth-making becomes a testament to the power of movies to both make our dreams come alive and process uncomfortable truths about life.

After young Sammy Fabelman (Mateo Zoryon Francis-DeFord) attends his first movie screening, he becomes so obsessed with the beautiful (and sometimes frightening) imagery that he begins making his own movies using his parents' 8mm camera. As he grows older (now played by Gabriel LaBelle), this obsession leads him to make increasingly elaborate short films with his friends. However, behind the scenes, the relationship between his father the scientist (Paul Dano) and his mother the artist (a captivating Michelle Williams) begins to dissolve, changing the nature of Sammy's films and life.

It's no surprise that this film is a love letter to movies (that perfect marriage of science and art) and Spielberg's unwavering love for cinema is absolutely infectious. The simple but effective ways in which Sammy brings his creations to life have an undeniable charm.



We also discover, with him, the filmmakers whose imagery impacted Spielberg's: from Cecil B. DeMille to John Ford and, yes, even Leni Riefenstahl. There are many doomsayers today lamenting the death of cinema, but for Spielberg, as long as dreams are alive, movies will be as well. — Forest Taylor

Directed by Steven Spielberg // Written by Spielberg and Tony Kushner // Starring Gabriel LaBelle, Michelle Williams, Paul Dano, Seth Rogan, Jeannie Berlin, Julia Butters, Robin Bartlett, Sam Rechner, Keeley Karsten, Oakes Fegley, Chloe East, Isabelle Kusman, Mateo Zoryon Francis-DeFord, Judd Hirsch, and David Lynch // 151 minutes // Rated PG-13 // Universal



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ALBUM REVIEWS

**BROCKHAMPTON**  
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★★★★★

Technically re-released two final albums in 2022. The first, *The Family*, was a Kevin Abstract solo vehicle detailing the group's beginnings, journey to fame, and eventual dissolution. It was also one of our top 10 albums of the year. The second — *TM* — was a surprise follow-up the next night. Billed as a parting gift for fans, *TM* (or *The Mountain*) is composed of demos that were initially slated for the band's seventh studio album. While it does carry an air of "compilation" with it, it stands out as a unique collection due to its genre fluidity and strong production work from member Matt Champion.

In fact, the first four songs act like a microcosm for the project as a whole — there's "FMG," a dirty opening track harkening back to the band's opus (*iridescence*); "Listerine," a spaced-out autotune number by way of Travis Scott; and finally, "New Shoes," which showcases some of the members' hungriest verses since *GINGER*. There's certainly a lot on display here, enough that new fans may find it jarring, but for those in need of one last fix from the genre-denying boy band, *TM* only becomes more rewarding with repeat listens. — Aaron Mook



**Fleshwater**  
*We're Not Here to Be Loved*  
Closed Casket Activities  
★★★★★

In the same tradition as Goat Punishment, Adventures, and any other number of side projects featuring nearly identical members, Fleshwater is a melodic hardcore band born out of nu-metal revivalists Vein.fm. With both bands throwing their sound back to such a specific period of time, it may be hard for some fans to recall exactly what '90s melodic hardcore sounded like. Fortunately, we have Fleshwater to remind us.

Front and center are guitar riffs that would make Deftones blush; heavy and distorted but undeniably catchy, they provide the backbone for alternating clean and screamed vocals, occasionally sounding more reminiscent of Glassjaw than anybody else. Elsewhere, they bring to mind the grunge-revival habits of gone-but-not-forgotten scene legends Title Fight. But perhaps the greatest trick Fleshwater pulls is brevity and how it serves their debut's replay value. With nine tracks (including a Bjork cover) spanning less than 28 minutes, the band cleverly sets listeners up to return for more. (Seriously, just consult the hook on the 77-second "Kiss the Ladder" and tell us you won't be running it back.) — Aaron Mook



**Vulfpeck**  
*Schvitz*  
Vulf Records  
★★★★★

Smooth, lush, and overflowing with soulful melodies, Vulfpeck's sixth album, *Schvitz* came in just under the wire in 2022. Released on Dec. 30, these 10 tracks are an excellent look at this unique band. Rising to public attention in 2014 with their silent album *Sleepify* — which profitably utilized a Spotify loophole — lucky listeners were treated to a funky outfit that's extremely hard not to love. Quickly gaining a loyal following worldwide, the band has continued to release a steady catalog of fantastic music after their watershed album *Thrill of the Arts* in 2015. Standouts on *Schvitz* (the Yiddish word for "sweat," and another term for a trip to the sauna) include everything that vocalist Antwaun Stanley is featured on, which is thankfully half of the album. While this isn't to diminish the amazing instrumental work the proper band does (far from it) — especially bassist Joe Dart and Theo Katzman ("Vulf" himself) — Stanley is a perfect match for the band's sound, one that's both throwback and inventive. While the opening track "Sauna" perfectly sets the stage, it's the midsection of the album, with tracks like "New Guru" and "Serve Somebody" where things really start to heat up. — Nick Warren

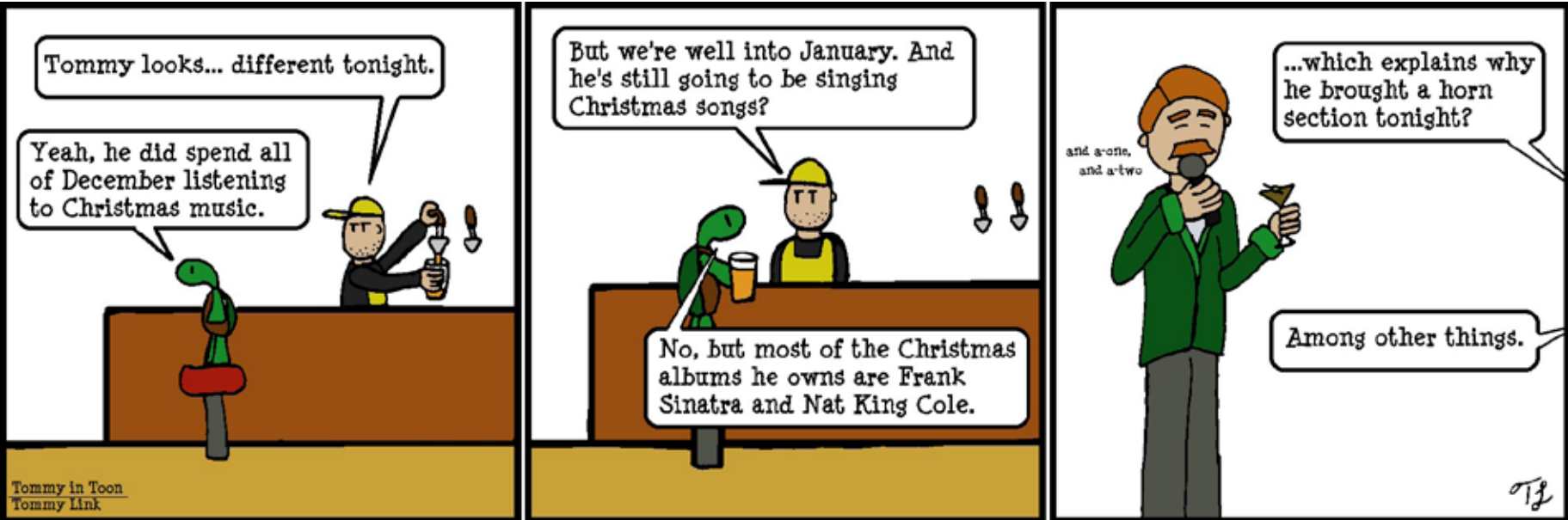


**Fireworks**  
*Higher Lonely Power*  
Funeral Plant Collective  
★★★★

After not releasing an album in nine years, Fireworks are back. The real mystery of this album is why they thought that the opening track was a good choice. For an album filled with poppy hooks and earworms, the inauthentic screamo parody that is "God Approved Insurance Plan" makes the ensuing tracks much harder to swallow. The fact that the second and third songs "I Want to Start a Religion With You" and "Goodnight Tomb" are so incredibly catchy makes this a record worth saving. Don't be surprised to hear the latter's millennial whoop (an overdone arpeggiation worth looking up) pop up in a Nissan ad or something. This Michigan six-piece knows how to write addictive songs, pure and simple. Perfect for fans of bands like Four Year Strong or their touring partners The Wonder Years, Fireworks are able to truly put the "pop" in pop-punk (listen to "Woods II" if you have any doubt). Just reading some of the titles, it's easy to pick up that the album has an overt post-religious concept behind it. Does the theme seem a little half-cocked and misleading? Maybe. Still, it's not shocking for a band whose best album is called *Gospel*. — Nick Warren



TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK





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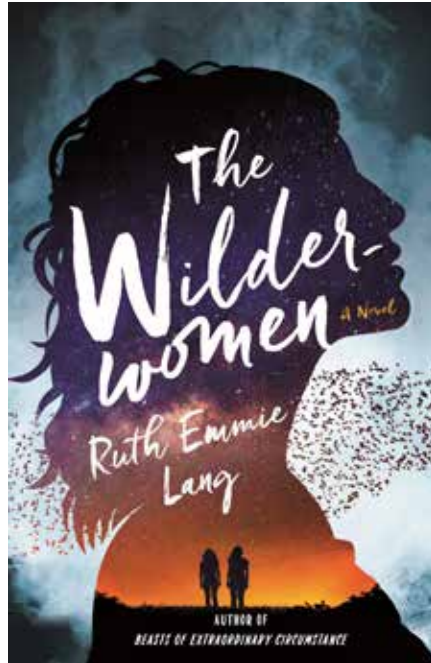
## Book Review: *The Wilderwomen*

The supernatural underscores relatable, familiar needs

Zadie and Finn's relationship hasn't been the same since their mom, Nora Wilder, disappeared five years ago. But when Finn begins to feel Nora's memories, the sisters know they must team up to find their lost mother.

Ruth Emmie Lang's *The Wilderwomen* follows the two sisters, who both have a sixth sense — Zadie can see into the future via premonitions and Finn can relive the memories of others — as they set off on a journey to find the mother that mysteriously left them behind. What was originally meant to be a beachside vacation planned by Zadie turns into a retracing of their mother's footsteps, aided by Finn's ability to relive her memories in each place.

As the older of the two, Zadie remembers more about their mom's erratic behavior leading up to her disappearance — how she would lose time, forget where she was, or disappear for hours with no explanation — and still holds onto anger from the five years between her disappearance and the present. But Finn is determined to



convince her sister that their mother is not only out there, but that they can find her.

As Finn spends more time in their mother's past via her memories, she begins to lose herself, finding it hard-

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## BOOK REVIEWS

er to return to the present. As Zadie begins to notice this, she must figure out how far she is willing to go to find their mother, with the threat of losing both her and Finn for good constantly looming over her decisions.

Lang's use of each girl's supernatural sixth sense in her storytelling allows *The Wilderwomen* to stand out against a backdrop of similar tales that pepper the contemporary genre. This magical realism is most prominent — and most wonderful — in scenes in which the sisters meet others with powers like them, from a constellation-themed

campsite in the middle of the Arizona desert to a small, secluded home in the Pacific Northwest.

While the aspect of a sixth sense and the idea of magical realism may deter some, the story is rooted within reality enough to make the characters relatable: everyone wants to be wanted, and wants someone with which to share everything, good and bad. *The Wilderwomen* appeals to the universal feeling of longing to belong to a group all our own. — Ally Kutz

St. Martin's Press // 336 pages // *Magical Realism, Contemporary*

### Book Review: *Did Ye Hear Mammy Died?*

Seamus O'Reilly memoir epitomizes good grief

In our last issue, our top 5 books of 2022 all revolved around reflections of some sort: from reflections on current events to those of the past, each book held something that made us stop to think. With Séamus O'Reilly's *Did Ye Hear Mammy Died?*, reflection on grief takes center stage in an unexpectedly heartwarming and hilarious way.

In 1991 during the Troubles in Derry, Northern Ireland, and at only five years old, Séamus O'Reilly and his 10 (!) siblings lost their mother to breast cancer, leaving them in the care of their loving but frazzled father. What follows is the story of how the family learned to cope with the loss, both through grief and through the mundane, everyday tasks they had to take on to keep their household running.

The book gets its title from one of the O'Reilly family's favorite stories, that of a 5-year-old Séamus at his mother's wake. Not understanding the "solemnity, not to mention the permanence" of his mother's death, O'Reilly went around the wake "appalling each person on their entry to the room by thrusting my beaming, 3-ft. frame in front of them like a chipper little maître d', with the cheerful inquiry: 'Did ye hear Mammy died?'"

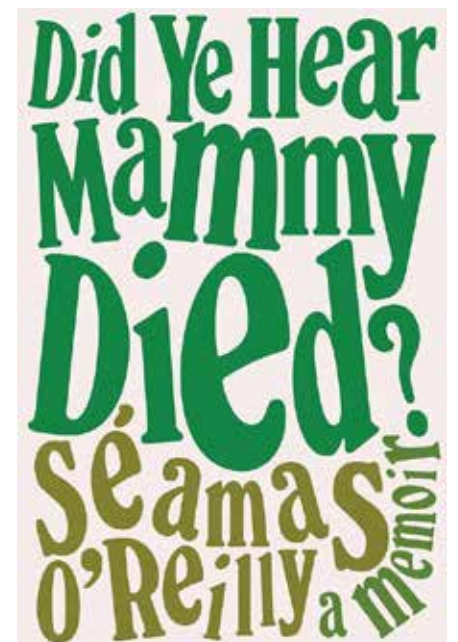
Don't take this book at its surface, though: while it may seem a lighthearted, funny retelling of a difficult time in the family's life, O'Reilly's story is also about the grief he experienced as he grew older and understood more definitively the loss of his mother at such a young age.

The memoir is an incredible feat in the fact that it proves that losing a par-

ent does not mean the end of being a child. O'Reilly's father played a large part in this, bringing up his children as best he could while still helping them to maintain their childhood; while this may not have been the case for his older siblings, Séamus' age allowed him to continue being a kid, even if it meant the grief would surface later.

Through 13 essay-like chapters, this memoir gives readers a look into the lives of a family devastated by the loss of their matriarch, trying to live life as normally as they can. The only issue that can really be taken with Séamus O'Reilly's *Did Ye Hear Mammy Died?* is that this author didn't discover it in time for it to make 2022's Top 5 list. — Ally Kutz

Little, Brown and Company // 240 pages // *Memoir*



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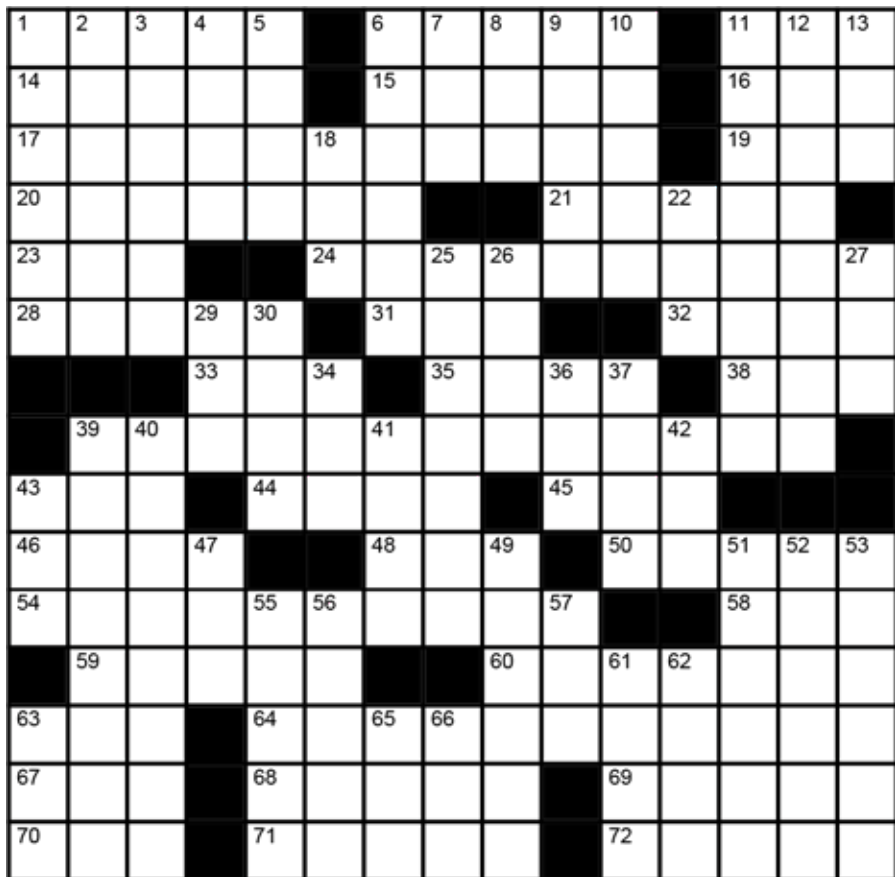
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# CROSSWORD



## Across

1. "The Jeffersons" actress Marla  
6. Salesperson's exhortation  
11. Home of L.A. and La.  
14. Plant source for tequila  
15. Stratospheric layer  
16. Habit wearer  
17. Her 62-Down lists her income from fighting evildoers  
19. Sanjay Gupta's network  
20. Start of an Ella Fitzgerald standard  
21. New York paper that published the very first crossword (1913)  
23. Part of FWIW  
24. His 62-Down lists his income from filmmaking  
28. Pre-Columbian Mexican  
31. "Old Macdonald" closer  
32. Deployed, as a sailor  
33. E-signature holder, maybe  
35. Yuletide tune  
38. Shakespeare's "poor venomous fool"  
39. Her 62-Down lists her income from hosting a talk show  
43. Actress Tyler  
44. Actor Schreiber  
45. Steaming  
46. 1930s migrant to California

48. Neon or xenon  
50. Dressed like a Supreme Court justice  
54. His 62-Down lists his income from being a chocolatier  
58. Give \_\_\_\_ whirl  
59. Black tea variety  
60. Far-too-memorable song  
63. Path  
64. His 62-Down lists his income from writing poetry  
67. Grow long in the tooth  
68. Woman's name that sounds like two letters  
69. Greta Thunberg, by nationality  
70. The \_\_\_\_ Moines Register  
71. One sought for advice  
72. Administered, as meds

## Down

1. Dev Patel's role in the 2021 film "The Green Knight"  
2. "You must let me!"  
3. Exile  
4. Some men's underwear  
5. Car radio button  
6. Pasta shape  
7. Aduba of "Orange Is the New Black"  
8. \_\_\_\_ Kippur  
9. Flabbergasted  
10. Mortise's partner

11. One known for finger-pointing  
12. Hot weather wear  
13. "Bel Canto" author Patchett  
18. Counterpart of "FF"  
22. 60 mg of Vitamin C, e.g.  
25. Odyssey, e.g.  
26. Pea jacket material  
27. Maple syrup source  
29. "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" network  
30. Extra: Abbr.  
34. "Just a heads-up..."  
36. Furniture wood  
37. "You're full of it!"  
39. User-edited reference entry  
40. Wicked looks  
41. "And away \_\_\_\_!"  
42. \_\_\_\_ Annie of "Oklahoma!"  
43. Burner setting  
47.1 Caribou relative  
49. Spit in one's food?  
51. Wetlands and tundra, e.g.  
52. Brokerage giant founded in 1991  
53. Cursed  
55. Shout of pain  
56. Start of the chorus to "Yellow Submarine"  
57. Reaction to shiatsu  
61. New England art inst.  
62. Tax info form ... or this puzzle's theme  
63. Gum, after use  
65. Trippy '60s drug  
66. 20-20, e.g.



## Answers to last puzzle





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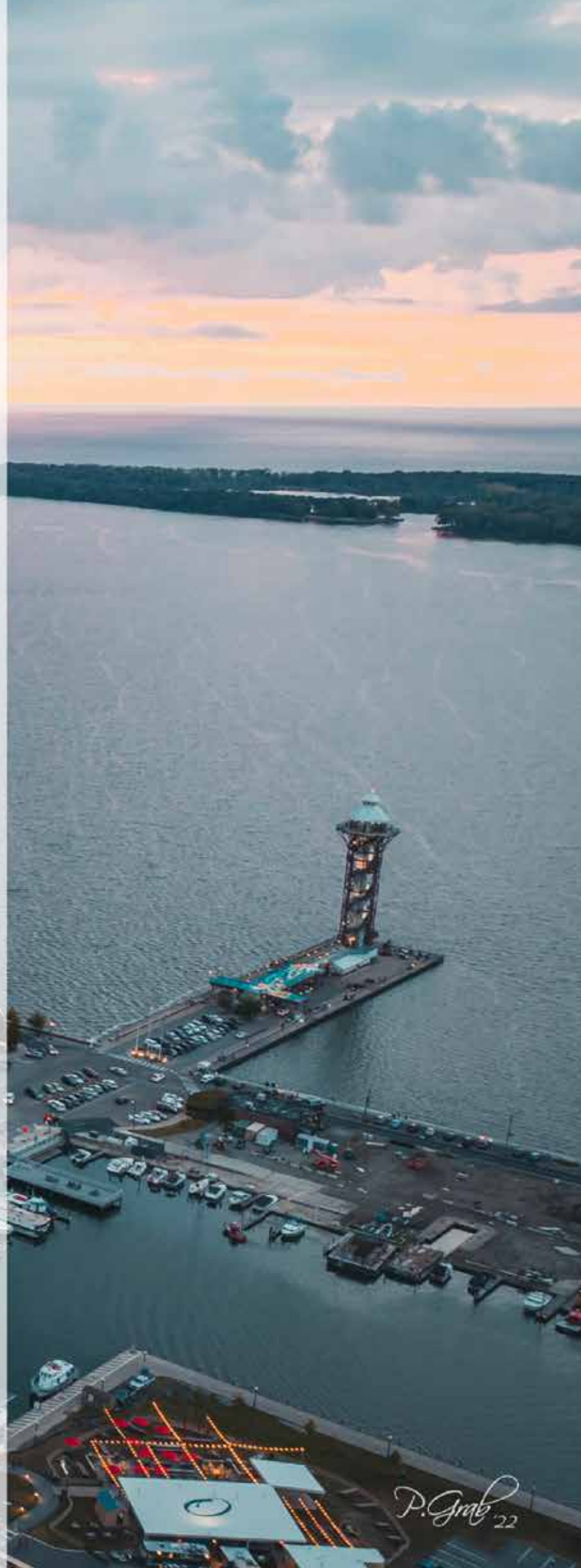
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