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# ERIE READER

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# YEAR IN REVIEW



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Nick Warren

**Media Editor / Photographer**

Jessica Hunter

**Local Reporter**

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**Contributors**

Liz Allen  
John Bavaro  
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Jonathan Burdick  
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Julia Carden

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Jen Sorensen  
Erica Stewart  
Melissa Sullivan-Shimek  
Cara Suppa  
Dave Tamulonis  
Forest Taylor  
Thomas Taylor  
Bryan Toy  
Larry Wheaton

**Cover Illustration and Layout**

Nick Warren

PO Box 10963  
Erie, Pa., 16514  
contact@eriereader.com

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## From the Editors: December 2025

It's about time

This is the third year now that I've had the task to research, compile, and write our annual Year in Review feature. And while it can be an overwhelmingly large chunk of print (this year's clocking in at nearly 4,800 words) it is a creative challenge that I truly look forward to taking on. It gives me the opportunity to look back at all that has come and gone within our year. But it can also make time feel really weird.

This year, in particular, has seemed painfully long. Each new day, a full frontal fire hose attack of awfulness that can make the days that fill up with keeping informed about it all, enduring it all, responding to it all, organizing to combat it all... feel endless. But there are many, many other ways to measure a year.

In the alt-monthly publishing sphere, we tend to measure time in terms of issues. The year passes with what has to be accomplished within the month in order to meet deadlines, flesh out themes, and produce a paper on time. June is not just June, it is the month

in which we select and photograph and write about 40 young people for the July issue. February is spent eating food all across the county to share our favorites in the March Food issue. And December will be spent compiling the results of our Best of Erie contest (voting is open through Dec. 15 FYI). In this way, every year is comfortingly familiar while also holding the creative excitement of figuring out ways to make these issues new and fresh, time and again.

We can feel time move through art – through the music and books and movies that define the periods of our lives. Music has a special kind of time-traveling power – listen to a song that was a young-adult obsession and you are magically whisked back to that time. Our regular album review contributors (Julia, Nathaniel, Aaron, Melissa, Nick, and Larry) share their top five lists from this year within, and share those albums which may become the stuff of time-traveled nostalgia in a decade or two. Our Erie Reader Book Club's first anniver-



sary was eclipsed in April. Ally Kutz has summed up the literary experience that was our year with that core group of thoughtful, lovely people. Our film reviewer Forest looks back at his cinematic experiences of the year and reminds us that watching movies alone at home is not the only option – getting out and experiencing movie magic in any kind of venue makes the experience deeper – ultimately making the time we spend watching things on screens more meaningful.

That which we use to measure time: our work, our hobbies, the music,

films, and books we enjoy, and the people we go through it all with, give us chronological touchpoints of joy, lightness, love, creativity, and togetherness, even through undeniably dark times. So often, when everything feels urgent, and stressful, and demanding – it's all too easy to miss the beauty that will ultimately truly define these days in your memory. Time, no matter how you measure it, has the audacity to move forward whether we notice it or not. And no matter how old you are, these are the days that will be the stuff of nostalgia all too soon.

## Happy Holidays



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# A New Chapter for Erie

A wave of women leaders signals a transformational shift across city and county government

By: Chloe Forbes

**C**hristina Vogel and Daria Devlin hadn't even earned their high school diplomas when then-County Executive Judy Lynch and mayoral candidate Joyce Savocchio took the Erie County electorate by storm in 1989.

The Erie Daily Times reported it was "The year of the woman" as numerous women were elected throughout the county and commonwealth.

The wave brought transformational change to Erie County. Lynch and Savocchio, both the first women in their positions, ushered in landmark developments like the Bicentennial Tower, Blasco Memorial Library, and new industrial sites, alongside a commitment to fiscal responsibility that reshaped the county's trajectory.

It seems that 36 years later, history has repeated itself. Across the county this year, a wave of women were elected to top positions. In the words of Ed Mathews of the Erie Daily News from 1989, the election "belonged to the women." Although this moment feels familiar, it's the start of a new chapter.

"I think it became very clear even in the primary that people were ready for a change in Erie," said City of Erie Mayor-elect Daria Devlin. "I think a lot of people have hopes and dreams for this community that you know, like me, they think it can be more than what it is, and I think that they saw in my energy and my vision for the city that same change."

Devlin captured a dominating 75 percent of the vote, beating Republican Matthew Thomas. Likewise, County Executive-elect Vogel won in a landslide with 63 percent of the vote, a historic margin of over 19,000 votes compared to the past two decades' margins ranging from about 100 votes to 3,000 votes.

The high voter turnout and numerous flipped precincts – including the City of Corry, Girard Borough, Lake City Borough, McKean Borough and Township, Wesleyville Borough, Fairview Township, Harborcreek Township, and Summit Township, all of which voted for Brenton Davis in 2021 – signal not only a vote of confidence for Vogel but a vote for change in leadership.

Newcomers like Dr. Kylie Morris in Millcreek Township and Chuck Gray in the City of Corry showed that people are looking for a new perspective on the political scene, while Emily Mosco Merski will be a new face on the Erie County Court of Common Pleas bench.

"I feel really good about it being a turning point," Vogel said of the county. "I'm excited that I get to be part of what the future looks like."

Lynch called Vogel after the election and said she still had a Vogel sign in her yard and was eager to help in any way she could, and Savocchio sent flowers to congratulate the newcomers, as did past County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper, who served from 2014 to 2021. It's not only a congratulatory gesture, but it's a sort of passing of the torch.



Women took home big wins in local government this election cycle including the offices of mayor and county executives, as well as down ballot and county elections.

## A Mandate for Change

Not only was this election about electing women, but it was also about electing people who deliver real results.

By door-knocking and meeting people where they're at, Devlin and Vogel both voiced that authentic conversations were a key factor in their victories.

"My campaign worked really hard both in the primary and in the general election to talk to as many voters as we could, to knock on as many doors as we could, to be in as many places as we could to really have authentic conversations with voters, and I think that helped," she said.

During those conversations, she said her vision of bringing Erie back onto the national map seemed to resonate with people. Devlin is prioritizing population growth, talent attraction, and housing stability in a time when the City of Erie is hemorrhaging people.

The Pennsylvania State Data Center estimates that the City of Erie lost 2,077 people from 2020 to 2024. Devlin and Vogel both believe the next four years could change the population's trajectory.

In order to do that, though, there are some infrastructural needs that must be addressed. After campaigning on a "fiscal first" platform, Vogel said she is focused on getting the county on a stable financial footing. "I've talked about the budget from the beginning, and that's going to be my focus," Vogel said. "I will get whatever budget is passed, and then I'll work within that."

In the interim, she's focused on listening and understanding what people in the county truly need, attending various municipality meetings, and identifying how she can help move people forward. "It's really trying to be a partner and not trying to lead the discussion," she said. "[It's about] understanding where everybody's at and what they need themselves to help get to the next place."

In Millcreek Township, Morris is following in Supervisor Kim Clear's footsteps, continuing work on stormwater issues as she brings a health-centric lens to the position.

A practicing family physician, Morris decided to run for office after research and numerous patients pointed to external factors impacting the well-being of Millcreek's population.

She plans to focus on stormwater infrastructure and active transportation (i.e., bikeability and walkability) while seeking grant funding to avoid further tax increases.

In the City of Corry, Chuck Gray is well-versed in grant-funded projects. As the director of Impact Corry, a nonprofit for the revitalization of the city, Gray joins Corry City Council with a community planning background. In fact, grant funding is what drove her to run for office.

"I think the people have opted for representation that is open to progress and change and collaboration, and that's the difference that I see in this choice that the voters have made," Gray said of this



Political newcomer Christina Vogel succeeded in a landslide victory against incumbent Brenton Davis for Erie County Executive. She will be sworn in alongside a number of women candidates including Mayor Daria Devlin, Dr. Kylie Morris in Millcreek Township, Chuck Gray in the City of Corry, and Judge Emily Mosco Merski.

election cycle.

She recognizes that a shrinking tax base is hurting municipalities like Corry: "I think the city has done incredible work with what they have to work with; I think they have been creative, and I think they have found ways to keep our city moving. I am fortunate that I am a strong fundraiser. I have the relationships and the abilities to do that, so how I'm seeing it is together as a community, we make the plan that decides and says, 'OK whether it's the sewer overhaul or the streets, we decide together what the priorities are, what has to come first,' and then I'm going to very intentionally seek funding for those because we don't have the tax base to support these projects."

#### A Different Approach to Leadership

With a career in public defense and advocacy, Mosco Merski has learned one thing is important when taking a seat on the bench in the courtroom: empathy.

"The role of a judge is to help someone move forward with their future," she said. "My position in the courtroom needs to be one of not only listening and understanding what is bringing these families into my courtroom but also helping them understand that I am part of the process that's going to help their lives get better or move forward in some regard."

In her work, she said she's learned that making judgments based on how she believes the world ought to be isn't realistic and doesn't take into account the realities that many residents face. She has been assigned to family court, and having a background in family law, she said there's not a huge learning curve for her, so she can focus on rebuilding trust within the legal system.

Many of the cases in family court deal with divorce, family separation, substance use, housing instability, and incarceration. Although the role of a judge is limited in its abilities due to ethics and maintaining impartiality, it's still an authority figure. Knowing that she'll likely see many children, Mosco Merski said she wants to be the kind of judge that people send their high school diplomas or GEDs to, their cheerleader.

"Your success is my success," she said. "I think that when people see you and can trust that you are

going to do that, it makes them feel as though the system is there to work for them rather than work against them."

The other women share that same kind of community-centric mindset. Already, Vogel has begun surveying departmental needs, Gray plans to tour the Public Works and Municipal Authority facilities to gain a better understanding of how she can help, and Devlin has begun collaborating with other elected officials.

"I think that as women we do lead differently, and I think it's fine to say that," Devlin remarked. "I don't want to say it's better or worse, but we definitely lead differently."

She and Vogel have both announced transition teams that include people from various sectors and party lines. "I think that's the thing about women – we are collaborators," Devlin said. "I think ultimately, we know we can't do it alone, and we've learned that over the years, and I just think that's a smart way to lead."

Vogel said it's important for her to put together a team that includes people from all walks of life and across the political spectrum so it's representative of the entire county. "I really tried to be thoughtful as to who was going to be on the transition team and where each department has someone that can kind of, from the outside, take an honest look at it and give me real honest feedback," she said.

Morris mentioned that when municipalities in the county don't work together, it's noticeable. In fact, she said that just taking a drive in the winter, it's easy to tell when entering a new municipality because the road conditions change drastically. She said that if people can work together and learn from those who are facing similar issues, there could be a more uniform response across the county, moving them forward.

#### Excellence and Representation

"Yes, we are a group of women – dynamic women – who have done great things and are going to do great things moving forward, but more importantly, we were the right people for the job," Mosco Merski said.



Democratic Mayor-elect Daria Devlin won the race for Erie mayor handily over Republican candidate Matthew Thomas. Erie will soon be run by women for the first time since 1989, when Mayor Joyce Savacchio and County Executive Judy Lynch were in their respective positions.

This year's election brought not only a wave of women into leadership, but a wave of diverse voices. Christine Rush was elected as a magisterial district judge, becoming the first Black judge in Erie County's history. Aubrey Hayes won her race for clerk of records, Brooke Sanfilippo became Erie City Controller, and Jasmine Flores and Marilyn Pol won their races for Erie City Council.

The breadth of women elected reflects a gradual shift, locally and nationally. "I think for decades now there's been a push to have women take office," Gray said. "Nationwide, I think that also women are feeling more empowered. They are more engaged, they are leaders in their community, and I feel that in 20 years from now, people won't even think twice about that."

Gray's right: women now make up just over 50 percent of Pennsylvania's and Erie County's population, according to the Department of Labor and Industry. Having women in leadership isn't exceptional – it's representative.

For the newly elected officials, the significance extends beyond their own tenure. They're keenly aware that young people are watching.

A mother of three sons, Devlin hopes to be a role model not only for young girls but for boys. She wants them to see leadership that looks different, that prioritizes collaboration and community – and to understand that women belong in these roles just as much as men do. Looking back at Lynch and Savacchio, she's not reminded of the barriers they shattered as women but as leaders who delivered results in Erie County.

"I think we always have to remember that we stand on the shoulders of those who come before us, and there are lessons to be learned both good and bad from all of the leaders," she said. "But I think it's up to us at this moment now to chart our own path."

#### Charting a New Path

That path forward is already taking shape. Before even taking office, these leaders have begun the work of collaboration, but the weight of expectation sits heavily on their shoulders.

"I do really believe that this is a really exciting moment for Erie, and I'll tell you I feel the weight of that," Devlin said. "I feel the expectation of our community, and I am quite sure that our other recently elected officials do as well, and I think we have a real obligation right now to deliver and to live up to these expectations. I feel that deeply, and I'm going to be working very hard to do that."

The next four years will test whether their collaborative leadership style can deliver the results Erie County voters are expecting. The newly elected officials take office in January, inheriting both the county's challenges and its potential. History may be repeating itself – but whether it evolves in the same transformative direction as 1989 depends on what happens next.

*Chloe Forbes is a local journalist. Reach her at chloe-forbes14@gmail.com*

# Presenting Erie Wordsmiths

## Ideal ideas for Christmas gift-giving

By: Liz Allen

For Christmas 2021, my sister Colleen gave me a subscription to Storyworth, an online service that provides an easy framework to write a memoir. Every week, Storyworth emails a writing prompt (or you can pose your own questions to answer) to jog memories about parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, family vacations, favorite books, first jobs, best friends, school days. The idea is to respond, in writing, to one question a week. At year's end, you have enough material for Storyworth to publish a hardcover keepsake book, complete with family photos.

Alas, I only wrote three Storyworth chapters before I fell hopelessly behind and let my subscription lapse.

Yet four years later, I remain determined to someday create a unique Christmas gift, a family history to share with my son, five siblings, and a host of grandkids. Recently, I've come across three Erie-centric ways that could make that a reality – if not for me, perhaps for you.

My first suggestion is to read *To Give to the Light*, a "biographical novella" that tells a lean but compelling story about the courage of immigrants, the love of family, the history of World Wars I and II in Italy and, as a bonus, the narrative of Erie's Italian immigrants.

The author is Michael A. DeMarco, an Erie native who lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and writes under the last name DiMarco, his family's surname before it was Americanized.

DeMarco attended Strong Vincent High School and Edinboro University and received a master's degree from Seton Hall University. In 1992, he founded Via Media Publishing, which has put out a quarterly journal and 70 books. He's also been consulted on documentaries for the Discovery Channel, Arts and Entertainment, the History Channel, and the Learning Channel.

*To Give to the Light* mentions familiar Erie landmarks, including St. Paul's Catholic Church, Italian ethnic clubs, Continental Rubber Works, and St. Joseph's Home, which DeMarco's grandfather helped build as a bricklayer.

But DeMarco's book, which is available at [viamediapublishing.com](http://viamediapublishing.com) and other online stores, is much more than a trip down memory lane for Erie folks. "There is a universal appeal about the immigrant experience since it is a common human experience," DeMarco explained in an email. "Language, dress, foods, labor, pressures to emigrate are the universal traits," he wrote. "Anyone who looks closely at their own families (chances are they immigrated sometime) can understand and have empathy for those of other cultures."

"Unfortunately, many haven't taken the time to question their own family's past and so don't appreciate the efforts made to bring them to a 'land

of prosperity and opportunity.' I hoped that my book would attract readers who are not of Italian ancestry, so they would ask how their own family history relates," he wrote to me.

In his book, DeMarco weaves in stories passed along by his grandparents but doesn't stop there. "It's great to absorb 'table talk,' but it's important to do solid research on topics of personal interest. I dove into the world wars to get a better understanding of what soldiers and others actually experienced. Most don't talk about the worst of it," he said.

His grandfather, Michele Antonio DiMarco, had followed his brother Pasquale to Erie from their village in southern Italy in 1913. Unlike his brother, Michele had not yet become an American citizen, and in September 1914, he received a telegram from the Consulate General of Italy: "You are to return to Italy immediately. You have been drafted into the army and must report to the military headquarters in Campobasso before December 1st."

The book then recounts the elder DiMarco's Italian Army experience on the front lines of the war, his capture by the enemy, and his dramatic escape from a prison camp. After the war's end, Michele DiMarco returned to Erie, but two decades later World War II threatened the lives and livelihoods of family members left behind in Montenero Val Cocchiara.

"All in Montenero who are on the Gustav Line, from newborn to elderly, suffer physical and mental scars from the war," DeMarco writes in his book. The military maps included as illustrations teach me more about World War II battles and casualties in Italy than I ever learned in the classroom.

I now feel motivated to find out more about my father's first cousin, Strong Vincent track star Clem Martin Jr., who was killed in battle in Italy at age 23 and is buried there.

I also hope to return to the Tuscany region of Italy, where my maternal grandparents were born, for more than the one-day visit my husband and

CONTRIBUTED



The cover art of *To Give to the Light*, a biographical novella by Michael A. DeMarco, shows an old-time slice of life from Erie's Little Italy. In the book's epilogue, DeMarco writes: "To give to the light," or "dare alla luce," is an "exquisite Italian phrase."

I had on a 2024 cruise. As DeMarco pointed out, "Studying the language and visiting the 'homeland' is a blessing."

DeMarco tries to get to Erie about once a year now. "The place we were born and had our formative years is just that: it formed our characters in subtle ways that uniquely stay with us forever," he wrote to me. "We always remember the hometown streets better than elsewhere, the homes, the stores, and the cast of characters we saw daily in grade and high school. Move away and you'll certainly miss things like Arnone's bread, a restaurant that made their own pierogies, or a tree you used to climb. Erie is the bigger family," he wrote.

In Erie, women religious have always been part of my "bigger" family. In fact, I fretted that I was called to become a nun, until a nun told my dad when I was in 10th grade that I should become a journalist.

Still, I'm fascinated by sisters such as Benedictine Joan Chittister, who worked on her school newspaper and has written more than 50 books, often edited by the late Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, who was also an Erie Daily Times reporter when she was a young nun.

I guess that's why I feel at home every time I step into Chapter 57, the gift shop at Mount St. Benedict, where many of Chittister's books, including her newest, *The Time is Now*, are sold. I hoped the store also had copies of Chittister's *38 Personal Stories to Transform a Life*, a delightful collection of short pieces that I reread to remind me of the value of taut, meaningful writing. In the first story, only a page and a half long, Chittister writes about Christmas Eve 1945 and how disappointed she was, at age 9, that her mother gave her a necklace instead of the skates or a bike she longed to receive. Years later, she realized that the birthstone on a chain was a

CONTRIBUTED



*The Secret Garden*, first published in 1911, has inspired Benedictine Oblate Jo Clarke's whimsical paintings.

"treasure ... amid the chaos of a collapsing world." Unfortunately, *38 Personal Stories* is no longer in print but a visit to Chapter 57 is, for me, always a pleasing contrast to the world's chaos. It's where I can buy monastery bread, homemade biscotti like the kind we dipped into Vin Santo (holy wine) in Italy, gorgeous cards with beautiful nature photos by the sisters, and handmade household gifts from the Mending Place, where former refugees are taught new skills and business acumen.

There are "amazing quilts" that are works of art by Bernadette Strada. There is acrylic artwork by Sister Peggy Pilewski and woodworking by Sister Audrey Steff, and much more.

Art by Dani Jimenez, a member of the Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus, is a new addition. Jimenez, from Costa Rica, produces her art through "&HerSaints," described as "a creative outlet where the sacred and profane converge in the experience of queer Central American Catholicism." Jimenez has been paired with Jo Clarke, a Benedictine oblate who works in Chapter 57, to introduce her captivating artwork to Erie and beyond. Look carefully at her "Mary of Nazareth" ornament and you will see that Mary, holding baby Jesus, has a nose ring. Her art challenges our fixed notions.

Chapter 57 (6101 East Lake Road) is open on Sundays from 10:30 a.m. to noon, with special holiday hours 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Dec. 13 and Dec. 20. Be sure to introduce yourself to Clarke, a talented artist who creates whimsical characters using flecks

of real gold in her paintings.

One piece of her art, featuring a tweeting bird, a curled-up cat, a sleepy mouse, a goldfish in a bowl, and two tilted mushrooms, is displayed on a table with a well-worn copy of her favorite book, *The Secret Garden*, a gift to Clarke from aunts in her native England. These days, Clarke finds a feminist message in the beloved children's story.

Clarke started painting to illustrate haikus composed by the late Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, who worked tirelessly to introduce young and old (including me) to the beauty of poetry. There is no doubt that my friend Mary Lou would be thrilled to know that two new poetry books are arriving in Erie.

The 2025 edition of *Iconic: The Anthology of Erie Poets* is a collaborative effort of NWPA Poetry, Gannon University's English Department, Community Access Media, and the Erie County Public Library. The cover art is "Public Dock" by Joseph Plavcan, which hangs on the second floor of the Erie Art Museum; it's reproduced with permission from the Plavcan family.

Clayton Bradshaw-Mittal, Gannon assistant professor of English, outlined why this anthology and another poetry collection, *North Coast Voices from Main Street Rag*, are important to Erie.

"We made a special effort to include poets from every corner of Erie. It is the people who make this place wonderful, and we want to place emphasis on the poets who breathe life into the culture of the county," they said.

Poets "across career stages" are included because, "We want to market Erie as a literary locale and the poets in it as unique voices in the larger literary world. This builds community by fostering confidence in poets across the Erie community. For some, this will be their first publication. There is so much great writing in Erie, and we want to continue building the poetry community," Bradshaw-Mittal wrote in an email.

To learn more about Erie's many outlets to hear poetry and to hone and share your own poetry, visit the website [nwpa poetry.com](http://nwpa poetry.com) or the NWPA Poetry page on Facebook.

*Iconic: The Anthology of Erie Poets* will soon be available at the Erie Art Museum and at local bookstores. To place a bulk order, contact [bradshaw013@gannon.edu](mailto:bradshaw013@gannon.edu).

As Bradshaw-Mittal wisely said, "This is an especially important time of year for sharing poetry. It is through poetry that communities and families partake in joy and warmth. The anthology is our gift to Erie, to our friends and family. It is a way of cementing a legacy of wordsmithing. Plus, the anthology is representative of the people of Erie, which means it bleeds through with the threads of resilience that define residents of Erie in winter."

Liz Allen is tickled that both her sister Kathy and her son Marc are working on historical fiction novels about her family. In 2026, she hopes to add to their collection. She can be reached at [lizerie@aol.com](mailto:lizerie@aol.com)



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# Erie's Year in Review 2025

Our year in politics, economics, arts, culture, athletics, education, and environment

By: Erin Phillips

**G**oodness gracious, has 2025 seriously only been one single year long? These past 365 days have felt like 365,000, am I right? When inundated from every conceivable angle with injustice, unfairness, greed, violence, lies, corruption ... It's hard not to let the daily deluge of flaming hot garbage take our eyes off of our community brilliance, helpful neighbors, and yes, even political wins we have experienced together.

And while nationally, the year in review is dominated with names like Trump, Musk, Noem, and Epstein, locally we're focused on names like Devlin, Woodard, Hagen, Vogel, and Gibbs to tell the story of our year. We've certainly had our ups and downs and we'll take a look at them all. So here goes nothing – let's review Erie's 2025!

## Erie's Shifting Political Landscape

Why don't we just get the politics out of the way, shall we? In response to the daily, often hourly horrors of the Trump administration, Erie has been host to multiple well-attended, peaceful **No Kings** protests – part of a larger movement of No Kings protests nationwide. In both June and October of 2025, crowds of constituents gathered to show their disapproval of Trump's policies including but not limited to ICE raids and arrests of immigrants, refugees, and New Americans, deploying National Guard troops into U.S. cities, holding SNAP and ACA funding hostage, and so, so much more. Locally, activist groups have been gaining momentum including **50501 Erie**, **French Creek Indivisible**, and **Fair Districts PA** – connecting with any of these groups will result in updates for future No Kings protests as they are organized.

We do have some political wins to celebrate locally. One such win is the unequivocal electoral annihilation inflicted upon our incumbent County Executive Brenton Davis at the hands of incoming **Christina Vogel**. This wasn't even close. This was a historically large landslide victory for the political newcomer Vogel, and her win speaks to Erie County's overall dissatisfaction with the county's direction over the last four years.

No need to dwell on the 2025 foibles of the former county executive, since he's out the door (BUT those foibles were embarrassing and many, including hijacking the Erie County Facebook page for personal political promotion, presenting a 2025 budget with so many errors, discrepancies, inaccuracies, and unauthorized transfers, the audit lit up like Clark Griswold's house at Christmastime, vetoing funding for literally any part of county government that that serves communities of color, including the Human Relations Commission, Booker T. Washington Center, the MLK Center, and Urban Erie Community Development Center, etc.). Additionally, Democrats remain in council majority – with a win for Jim Wertz

CONTRIBUTED // ERIN PHILLIPS



Democrat Daria Devlin wins the election for Erie's mayor // Project CLEER opens at the Blasco Memorial Library // Christina Vogel trounces Brenton Davis to become Erie's next county executive // Marchello Woodard was shot and killed by his parole officer, with little progress made in the investigation

who will be filling the seat of outgoing Andre Horton (who is moving over to city council in the new year).

Speaking of the city, we have a new mayor in **Daria Devlin** who will be inaugurated on Jan. 5 as the second female mayor of Erie and 49th overall. Devlin secured her win with 75 percent of the vote over Republican candidate Matthew Thomas. This came after Devlin successfully primaried out two-term incumbent Mayor Joe Sember. Devlin ran a wildly successful campaign, connecting personally with many constituents, and has filled her cabinet with a diverse group of folks who have been working in service to the community for years including (among others) Erin Carey (40 Under 40 class of 2025), Corey Cook (40 Under 40 Class of 2014), Amy Murdock (40 Under 40 Class of 2019), and Jenessa Norton (40 Under 40 Class of 2025).

The library has been a point of contention for basically the entirety of the Davis administration as the group "Keep Our Library Public" brought a lawsuit opposing the installation of Gannon University's water research facility **Project Neptune** in the Blasco Library building. That suit has recently been settled, although the details of that settlement are not yet public. The first phase of Gannon's initiative, Project CLEER, has already been installed and is currently free and open to the public in the eastern corner of

the main floor of the library. The display features interactive exhibits showing how natural and human phenomena impact our Great Lakes, as well as a local environmental art exhibit, and the centerpiece, "a room-sized, global display system that uses computers and video projectors to display planetary data onto a six foot diameter sphere, analogous to a giant animated globe." According to Gannon President Walter Iwanenko, "This is the 206th installation of this NOAA Science On a Sphere in the world and we have it, here in Erie. Kids can get on the kiosk and there are 600 different data sets that are available to interact with. One of our goals with this project is to bring more people into the library."

After a good amount of contention, and jam-packed public comment dockets, Erie City Council voted unanimously to transfer ownership of the **Erie Zoo** to Erie Events. This move was largely supported by zoo management, with president and CEO of the Erie Zoo Roo Kojancic saying, "We encourage everyone to continue to be on board with this – it's a fantastic opportunity for the zoo, for the city, and for the region."

One cannot speak about news and politics in the City of Erie in 2025 without contending with what has been an increasingly frustrating and slow process of seeking justice for **Marchello Woodard**, an

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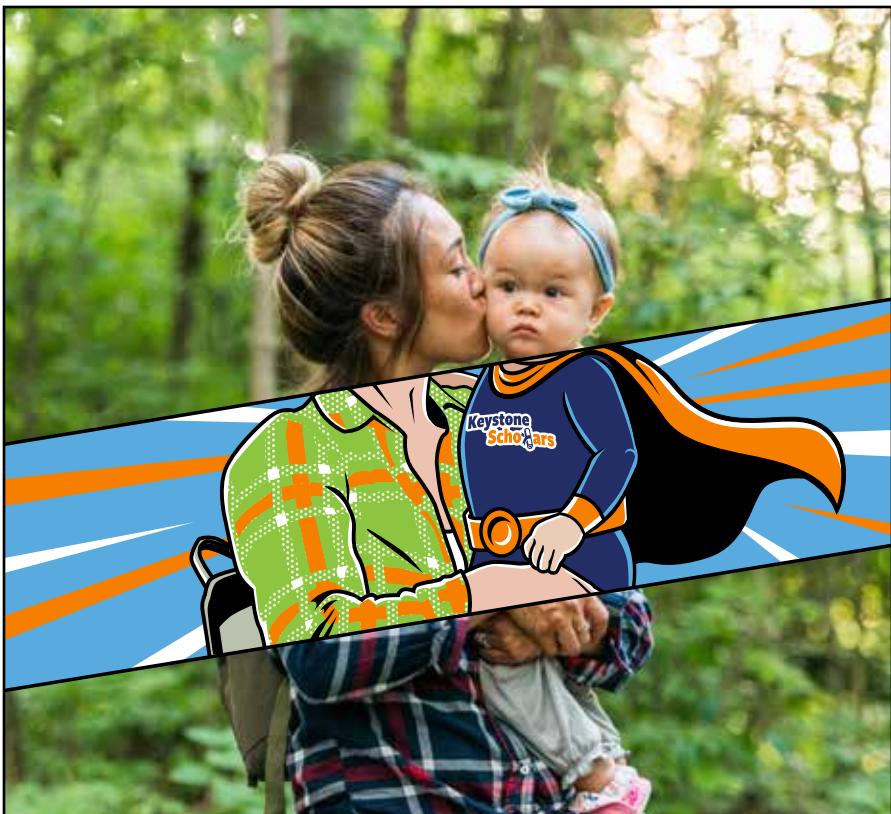
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unarmed Black man, a father, partner, and volunteer, who was fatally shot by his parole officer in July. As of this writing, the name of the shooter has yet to be released publicly, no arrests have been made, and the family and friends of Woodard, as well as the community at large, are left to grapple with his death without answers or support from state law enforcement. One advocate involved with the “Justice for Chello” movement Cyndi Treiber stated, “I think the Brown and Black community are feeling dismissed. They feel that this would not have happened if the roles of race were reversed. Unfortunately, when you have a lack of transparency, people feel unheard and then they get angry and that’s where people are right now.” Continued protests for those seeking answers in the case continue at both the site of the shooting and at city and county council meetings.

### Erie's Growth and Economic Development

Not sure if you've noticed but there's been some pretty disruptive construction literally everywhere, but most notably on the **Bayfront Connector**. What is an eyesore of an inconvenience now will eventually pay off when the bayfront becomes more efficient for commuters and safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Hopefully, you've all settled into a 12th Street (or other alternate) routine route for any necessary cross-city traffic, as we all anticipate a clearer path forward in 2027.

Also, not sure if you noticed, but a whole-ass house was moved early this fall. The 4,500-square-foot Queen Anne-style mansion known as the **Olds Norman House** now has a new address after spending 141 years in one place. When the time came to say goodbye to Wehrle Hall, a mid-century dormitory that Gannon President Walter Iwanenko described as at its “end-of-life,” the university found itself at a decision point regarding multiple historic buildings that were in need of extensive, expensive restorations. At that point, “Mr. Hagen wanted to have a conversation.” And it was during that conversation that the discussion of physically moving the house started to become a reality and the **Historic Erie Preservation Trust (HEPT)** became involved.

So, after Kidder Architecture and Jefferys Construction did some shoring up of the building's exterior brick work, Wolfe House and Structure Movers were hired to do the enormous job. Using mostly robotic technology controlled through a single device, the house was jacked up on beams, spun 180 degrees, and resettled from Seventh Street to Sixth in an incremental process that, due to unforeseen weather-related circumstances, took about 7 hours (when it was initially estimated to take 60 to 90 minutes). Come fall, once all the renovations are complete on the Olds Norman House, the university will hold a dedication ceremony to welcome the newest old addition to the West Sixth Street Historic District.

The HEPT will be leasing this home along with the recently restored **Carter Shannon House** (on the corner of Sixth and Sassafras) and the fresh-faced **Jarecki House** to Gannon for the foreseeable future.



(Clockwise from top left) The Olds Norman House was literally moved from West Seventh to West Sixth Street // The EDDC breaks ground on the Flagship City Commons project // The Historic Erie Preservation Trust completes work on a number of historic buildings including Herb and Honey Bakery // The Erie All Stars performed a set of Beatles songs for Celebrate Erie

The Olds Norman house will be utilized by the university as guest lodging for visiting lecturers, interviewees, alumni, and other visitors. While the Carter Shannon building is housing for 10 lucky students, the Jarecki House will serve as a space for university advancement offices as well as meeting and gathering space for Gannon alumni.

While on the subject of the HEPT, their work continues on and off Sixth Street, including the new spot for **Herb and Honey** bakery within the restored former Sophia's Tavern on Fifth and Cherry streets. The group has also completed work on two other homes in that area at the Walker-Filer house (555 W. Sixth St.) and at 621 Cherry St. while work continues on the 409 W. Sixth St. rowhouses, the Spencer Townhouse apartments (527-529 West Sixth St.), the Whittier House (530 W. Sixth St.), the Rindernecht House (512 W. Sixth St.), the Albert Jarecki House (520 W. Sixth St.), the Robert Jarecki House (558 W. Sixth St.), the Thayer Thompson House (605 W. Eighth St.) and neighboring Griffith O'Brien English House (613 W. Eighth St.), as well as the aforementioned Olds-Norman House. That's a whole lotta old houses getting millions of dollars of investment in the City of Erie.

While the HEPT takes care of a number of antique buildings in the West Sixth Street Historic District, the **Erie Downtown Development Corporation** continues work within the State Street Corridor, which also happens to be in the process of becoming its own nationally registered historic district. With the completion of the massive parking facility on Fifth and Peach streets also came the new home

for Dave's Diner (sic), while the Cashier's House space is now home to a legacy Erie restaurant in Serafini's Trattoria. Construction has begun in the open space left vacant by the demolition of the former Greyhound Bus Station on North Park Row for what will eventually be **Flagship City Commons**, “a versatile building, combining both office and commercial spaces, designed to foster community and economic growth in this vibrant district.”

Our other downtown champion, the **Erie Downtown Partnership (EDP)** has been working all year long to bring meaningful events and resources to our downtown district including helping to create another successful **Celebrate Erie** this year, which was headlined by Gym Class Heroes and Russell Dickerson, and concluded with an Erie All Stars tribute to the Beatles, a nod to our outgoing Mayor Schember who cites the Fab Four as one of his faves. Additionally, the EDP facilitated multiple outdoor movie nights, weekly local bands in Perry Square, helped to expand access to the Pay-What-You-Can farmers markets, held weekly sunrise yoga classes, and their annual fall fest along with local small business bolstering, mutual aid projects for our downtown neighbors, and just generally continuing to work to make Downtown Erie a cleaner, more welcoming, fun, inclusive destination for everyone in Erie.

### The Fun Stuff: Arts, Culture, and Athletics

If Erie is defined by anything in 2025, it has to be the color purple. Hopefully as many of our readers as possible made it to one of four **Moon Mammoth**



(Clockwise from top left) Erie Blues and Jazz Fest celebrates in Frontier Park // The Erie SeaWolves become the Moon Mammoths with John Oliver's help // Basement Transmissions becomes Centennial Hall // The Hagen History Center's Girard campus planted 1.2 million sunflowers

games this season. In case you've been living under a Pleistocene rock, John Oliver of *Last Week Tonight* solicited submissions from Minor League baseball teams from across the country who would be open to having the show rebrand their team. And among 47 total submissions, Oliver chose our very own Erie SeaWolves to overhaul, citing reasons such as the SEAwolves in fact play nowhere near the sea. After some research, the show decided on the name the Moon Mammoths, as a nod to local fisherman William Moon's 1991 discovery of mammoth fossils in Lake Pleasant. Shortly thereafter, a giant purple mastodon named Fuzz E. Mammoth was welcomed with open arms to the Gem City.

If you were one of the record-setting 7,070 fans in attendance at the Moon Mammoth's inaugural game on July 19, perhaps you saw Oliver himself throwing out the first pitch or leading a rousing version of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" during the seventh inning stretch. It was pure joy, as minor league baseball should always be. In an interview at UPMC Park, Oliver said, "Minor league baseball is one of the great things that America has. If you are lucky enough to have a minor league team anywhere near you, support it. You won't regret it."

The SeaWolves/Moon Mammoths came within a game of bringing home a three-peat Eastern League Championship this year, but we truly won something greater than a championship this season: the feeling of our community fully embracing a wacky idea and letting the joy of rooting for our team bring us all a little closer. Thanks for that, John Oliver.

I suppose, if purple isn't the defining image of Erie

in 2025, alternatively it's **sunflowers**. Was there literally anyone in anyone's newsfeed that *didn't* visit the epic sunflower field at the Hagen History Center's Girard campus? Didn't seem like it and for good reason – it was an awe-inspiring spectacle of natural beauty. The vastness of 1.2 million sunflowers is difficult to wrap your mind around without witnessing it. And hopefully we'll all get another chance in 2026.

The independent music scene in Erie is breathing a sigh of relief after longtime owner of **Basement Transmissions** (music venue, art gathering space, and lighthouse to local original music weirdos) Bob Jensen decided to sell the building and it was quickly cradled in the open arms of Jensen's former bandmate Jason Lavery and wife Nicole, who are longtime friends. The entrepreneurs behind Lavery Brewing Company have renamed the venue **Centennial Hall** (a nod to both the formative former Forward Hall as well as a variety of hops used in their signature beers) and plan to continue the legacy of the indie venue while expanding on what Jensen built over the years. They plan to renovate and repair the building over this winter and reopen in April, as they host their first show back welcoming The Menzingers on the final date of their 2026 tour.

It's been an active year for our local nonprofits. Under the threat (and reality) of cuts to grant funding across the federal board, Erie has thrown tremendous support to our charitable organizations, making this the biggest year yet for the annual giving event **Erie Gives Day**. The numbers are jaw-dropping: \$11,357,387 raised by 38,998 indi-

vidual donations to 539 nonprofits. Among those nonprofits who benefited from our community's astounding generosity, we have some news:

**Erie Arts and Culture** welcomed a new director in Susannah Faulkner (40 Under 40 class of 2023) this year.

**Erie Blues and Jazz Festival** celebrated its second year of resurgence after missing out in 2023.

**The Performing Artist Collective Alliance (PACA)** has welcomed youth theater program **Footlights** under its collective umbrella, as it continues to bolster community theater in all forms while restoring, improving, and expanding their historic building.

**The Barber National Institute** held its last ever Beast on the Bay, a massively popular *American Ninja Warrior*-style athletic competition/fundraiser. I have to say, it felt weird having a "Best Athletic Competition" Best of Erie category this year without them, as they have been the favored winner of that contest for 11 years in a row.

**The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network** has partnered with BikeErie to expand and improve the recently christened **Erie Bike Co-Op**, helping to get affordable bikes into the hands of those in Erie who need them most. Helmed by 2025 40 Under 40 alum Garrett Raszmann, the co-op continues to grow in aid to the community.

**WQLN** saw record numbers on Erie Gives Day, in response to massive federal funding cuts. While the official White House website might say they are “ending taxpayer subsidization of biased media,” those who love WQLN/PBS/NPR’s programming, children’s educational shows, news, music, and cultural features see it differently and showed up to donate a record \$213,714.57 between 1,208 donors. And while this can’t truly make up the gap of millions of dollars of funding erased, it does speak to the dedication our community has for public media.

## Working Smarter and Harder: Education in Erie

2025 welcomed a new superintendent for our City of Erie schools in **Dr. Natalyn Gibbs**, as she began her post in July, coming to Erie from Nashville, Tennessee and bringing along with her a vast amount of educational experience ranging from her positions as a teacher, an administrator, a principal, and a director. "My passion lies in empowering students to discover their unique talents and pursue their dreams. I believe that strong schools are the heart of a thriving community, and I am eager to partner with students, families, educators, and the entire Erie community to provide our students with the resources and opportunities they need to flourish," Gibbs shared in a public statement. "Together, we will build on the district's existing strengths and create a truly exceptional educational experience for all."

**The Erie County Community College** continues its exponential growth since opening in 2021 when they welcomed just 231 individuals into their budding program. EC3 now boasts enrollment numbers of 800+ students, meaning, as EC3 President Dr. Chris Gray put it, “one out of every 350 residents in Erie County is right now registered in class.” Having

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(Clockwise from top left) The Tall Ships festival returned to Erie // Dr. Natalyn Gibbs was hired as Superintendent of Erie's Public Schools // President Barack Obama spoke to a sold-out crowd at the Erie Insurance Arena // Dr. Chris Gray celebrates the growth of EC3

just received a \$50,000 grant from Empower Erie to offset unexpected, emergency costs among their student body, the community college is helping the whole student to flourish not only with education, but with a financial safety net that will allow them to focus on their education above all else.

The 44th President of the United States, **Barack Obama** was brought to the Erie Insurance Arena in September by the **Jefferson Educational Society (JES)** as part of their 17th annual Global Summit. The former two-term president spoke to a sold-out crowd of 8,000. Speaking on the current administration, ICE, AI, human rights in the U.S. and internationally, and more, Obama's message was, unsurprisingly, one of hope. Additionally, on the slate of events presented by the JES, Erie welcomed Neil DeGrasse Tyson, Mike Pence, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Jim Kelly, among others.

**The Tall Ships festival** returned to Erie's waterways in 2025. And while the U.S.S. *Brig Niagara* was notably absent from the festivities this year (due to ongoing repairs), the Port of Erie welcomed vessels like the *Pride of Baltimore II*, the *Appledore IV*, and the *St. Lawrence II*, among others. While the construction on the bayfront may not have provided the most beautiful backdrop to the incoming tall ships, our gorgeous bay and waterfront certainly made up for the dust.

#### Our Changing Local Climate

Last year, I invited local environmental advocate Jenny Tompkins (40 Under 40 class of 2024) to fill us in on our local and regional climate change situation, as having someone with intimately close

knowledge of legislation, actions, inactions, etc. was helpful in seeing the bigger picture. This year she suggested I contact **Neel Singh**, who joined the regional environmental activist organization PennFuture in the summer of 2025 as Erie's civic engagement coordinator, a position created to expand environmental and conservation volunteer activities and coalition building in the Northwest. Take it away, Neel!

*Erie is known for its resilience. And when it comes to fighting for conservation in the face of environmental adversity, we don't pull any punches. Local advocates are happy to celebrate some wins this year, while federal and state hurdles provide plenty of opportunity to continue the fight. So, in 2025 our work is varied and vast, and includes:*



(Clockwise from top left) Neel Singh, Erie's civic engagement coordinator for PennFuture, contributes this section // Riparian restoration of Cascade Creek // The proposed IRG plastics recycling plant vacates Erie plans // The former Erie Coke site is being redeveloped by the Erie Port Authority

**Riparian Restoration!** The Cascade Creek project coordinated between the City of Erie, the Erie County Conservation District, SONS of Lake Erie, PA Sea Grant, and Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park (LEAF) has made huge strides in restoring the health of a critical watershed on the west side of our Gem City. Riparian ecosystems are a massive benefactor in native wildlife returning to Erie. Check it out the next time you're in Frontier.

A new chapter is unfolding for the former **Erie Coke** site. Now in the hands of the Erie Port Authority, it remains to be seen what lies in store for the boundless acres of the former facility. A waterfront boardwalk is popular among constituents, but the cleanup of the former site could take decades. In large part due to the efforts of advocacy group Hold Erie Coke Accountable (HECA), Erie Coke's CEO Paul Saffron was ordered to pay a fine of \$700,000 after decades of environmental negligence. Advocates call it a slap on the wrist, but thanks to the tireless work of HECA and local activists, there is now acknowledgment that harm was done to Erie.

The state budget hiatus finally came to an end... at the cost of Pennsylvania's involvement in the **Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)**. RGGI would have implemented a cap on how much carbon power plants were allowed to emit. Governor Shapiro has proposed his own cap-and-trade program called **PACER**, as well as the **Lightning Plan**, which could increase renewable energy in the state. These are pieces of legislation to watch in 2026.

A proposed plastic waste facility was canceled in April. The facility, spearheaded by **International Recycling Group**, would have crushed waste plastic into smaller pieces and sent them to Gary, Indiana to be burned – PennFuture opposed the project as it posed a significant threat to Erie's air and water safety.

Erie is getting a massive boost for wastewater and runoff infrastructure in the form of a nearly \$30 million fund from state-run **PENNVEST**. This announcement was made this past summer.

**Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania**, PennFuture's strategic environmental partner, has started to make inroads into Erie and northwestern Pennsylvania as a whole. Statewide, they are pushing for solar-ready warehouses and proper stormwater management alongside PennFuture in the state legislature.

Thanks for that update, Neel, and for spearheading the absolutely most important work that there is. While the country continues to divide along ideological lines, the planet really doesn't care. Earth will survive us. And we'll all go down together, no matter what side of the political aisle we're on unless we act with the prudence and tenacity of groups like PennFuture.

#### Our Erie Reader's Year in Review

This year has been one of both big and small changes here at the Reader. We've officially vacated what has been our home for the past 10 years on the 13th Floor of the **Renaissance Centre**, as the new owners prepare to renovate and repurpose the build-



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## YEAR IN REVIEW

ing. We'll sorely miss the stellar views of Presque Isle and the SeaWolves stadium that our offices afforded, but we look forward to whatever space the future holds for us. For the time being, if you need to send us anything, use PO Box 10963, Erie, PA 16514.

We've continued to build on our **subscription model**. You can subscribe to the Erie Reader for \$15 a month, which means you get our monthly print issue sent to your preferred address, you get a monthly exclusive newsletter, you get subscriber-only giveaways of local concert, theater, and sports tickets, and you get the satisfaction of knowing that you're helping to support local print media. With everything everywhere becoming increasingly over-digitized, clickable, AI-ified, and the like, doesn't it feel good to hold a physical paper written by actual human beings in your hands? The Reader will always be free to read in print and online, but, as we've mentioned before, it is definitely not free to make. Your support really helps. Click the donate button at the top of our website to learn more.

We've added a host of new regular columns to our publication this year and we couldn't be happier with them! Shout out to contributors **Edwina Capozziello** (who pens "Edwina Tries..." each month), **Mary Birdsong** (bringing us a "Bird of the Month" while inspiring the budding birders of Erie), **Jeff McCullor** (taking his beers for walks and teaching us some stuff along the way), and **Dave Tamulonis** (making our small city feel a little smaller).

Additionally, you might have noticed a bit more local government coverage lately. That's due in part to your generous donations – we've been able to bring on a part-time local government correspondent in Alana Sabol. Alana has been attending every single city and county council meeting since February, writing up a summary of the meetings for our website under the heading **The Reader Beat**, and then including a recap of these meetings in each monthly print issue. This kind of regular coverage of local government has effectively gone away within the local news universe, so Alana's presence at these meetings, and her thorough reports of them, is unquantifiably important. The way our local elected officials vote, act, budget, respond, behave, etc. directly affects our daily lives in Erie, and being able to hold them accountable to their constituents is paramount.

Our **Erie Reader Book Club** turned one year old in April. It has been such a joy to run – to read incredible books (each selection corresponds with the monthly theme of the Erie Reader issue) and to get to know our Reader readers a little better. It's so interesting how we (being the editors) can get a certain impression of our readership from social media and the online universe, but being able to connect with the actual people who pick up our paper every month and appreciate it without public comment has been enlightening and refreshing. Each coming month, I look forward to meeting with everyone, including our OG members Vicki, Vicky, Victoria, Niki, Steve, AJ, Kathy, Pam, and my co-hosts Ally Kutz and Kyle Churman. Werner Books and Coffee is the most welcoming, cozy place, and

our discussions always leave me energized. I deeply appreciate everyone who helps make that monthly event so thought-provoking and special.

In July, we welcomed 40 new folks to **Erie's 40 Under 40** club, and they were such a stellar and impressive bunch. We had folks from all fields, all walks of life, all viewpoints – and their work in the community is always so inspiring to learn about. Unfortunately, we lost our planned venue mere weeks before our annual 40 Under 40 Experience, so rather than attempt to pull off a shoddy pivot, we had to cancel it this year. Rest assured, 2025's class will get their time in the spotlight as we plan an even bigger and better event in 2026!

Our yearly **Best of Erie** contest has gotten a facelift this year, as we've streamlined and simplified both

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"With everything everywhere becoming increasingly over-digitized, clickable, AI-ified, and the like, doesn't it feel good to hold a physical paper written by actual human beings in your hands?

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nominations and voting. We had nominations open through October and into November, then those who earned the top five nomination spots made it onto our final ballot. That final ballot is open now and voting closes on Monday, Dec. 15! So make sure, when you put down this paper, you head over to [bestof.eriereader.com](http://bestof.eriereader.com) and vote for your favorite people, places, and things then stay tuned for our January issue, hitting newsstands on Thursday, Jan. 15 to see if your picks won.

What a year it has been! There is something to be said for leaning into your community when times are bleak, and we here at the Reader are so honored and thankful to be able to support the Erie community through our arts and music coverage, our bolstering of local businesses and entrepreneurs, and for lifting up the voices of our writers, editors, photographers, contributors, and artists who make the Erie Reader what it is. Be sure to check the masthead on the first page regularly and get to know the names of the folks who really bring this paper to life – they're such a special group of people that I am honored to call colleagues and friends.

More than anything, though, we couldn't be us without you, our Reader readers, who loyally pick up our paper, click on a link, vote in a contest, share your thoughts, and generally help make our little local alt-news print media experiment a success. Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, and happy holidays. Here's to 2026!

*Erin Phillips is looking forward to continuing to offer her thoughts and words in print in 2026 and is perpetually thankful and honored to have the position of managing editor for such a cool publication. She can be reached at [erin@eriereader.com](mailto:erin@eriereader.com)*



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## Bird of the Month: Bonaparte's Gull

A stunning winter guest

By: Mary Birdsong

Let's get this out of the way first: although I've been dismissed as pedantic for saying this, there is no such thing as a seagull. There are many types of gulls, but none of them have that name. Seagull is a generic term applied erroneously to all gull-like birds that "hang around the shoreline and parking lots."

If you start looking more carefully, you'll find a fascinating set of birds that range in size from having a wingspan of 65 inches (Great Black-backed Gull) to a wingspan of 24 inches (Little Gull).

Now on to the main feature.

One particularly interesting species in the gull group is the Bonaparte's Gull (banding code BOGU), named for Charles Lucien Bonaparte – nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte – who made important contributions to American ornithology as a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia during the 1820s.

It is one of the smaller gulls, with a

wingspan of only 33 inches. And when Bonaparte's Gulls (called Boneys by birders) are in breeding plumage, the head is all black, which is referred to as a hood. It makes for a stunning bird.

The compact 13-inch-long bird is white on the underside and in the tail, gray on the back (called the mantle), with black tips on their wings. In winter time, when they are here in Erie, they have a dark "ear spot" behind their eyes rather than the full hood of their breeding plumage. Their bills are black and their legs are a reddish pink. Birds that have not reached maturity have darker feathers along the back, the trailing edge of the wings, and the tail.

Most gull species nest on the ground (or rooftops in urban areas) but, interestingly, Bonaparte's Gulls nest in trees and are the only gulls to do so. Another fascinating fact is that in the non-breeding season BOGUs feed on fish like many other gulls, but during

breeding – since they nest away from the shoreline – they subsist almost exclusively on insects. Nesting happens well north of Erie.

As winter draws nigh look for Bonaparte's Gulls around Presque Isle and in the bay when there is open water to fish. Other great spots for good looks are the North Pier at Presque Isle and the South Pier at the foot of Port Access Road on the mainland. They will be joined by many other wintering gull species like the Black-backed and Little gulls I mentioned above, as well as large numbers of our resident Ring-billed and American Herring gulls. In fact, winter is prime gull season here as long as things don't freeze over.

So, bundle up for a visit to some point along the bay and look for large rafts of gulls out in the open water. Compare the sizes looking for the smallest ones that fly with faster wing beats than larger gulls. Later in the spring, you may even see one

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If you call a gull of any sort a "seagull," you may just have to answer to Mary Birdsong herself. Among the many varieties of gull that call Erie home, you shan't find a seagull (in name) among them – but keep an eye out for the charming Bonaparte's Gull, a smaller-sized, hooded shorebird that nests in trees rather than on the ground like most other gulls.

with its hood developing as it molts into breeding plumage. Say hello to these travelers who think of Erie as a great spot to winter!

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

## Edwina Tries... A Morning in Albion

Southwest Erie County borough offers plenty of small town charm

By: Edwina Capozziello

Just 20 miles southwest of the City of Erie is Albion Borough. On the outskirts but still in Erie County, it's a lovely (not-too-far) drive to take on a Saturday morning. After co-work-

ers suggested a few places to me, my partner and I did just that. It's best to get to Albion early. In traditional small town manner, much of Main Street closes by 2 p.m.

We started our visit with breakfast at Big Irene's Little Diner. It's really cute and serves up big dishes, lots of fresh coffee and local, real maple syrup. I'm a sucker for places with whimsy and there was a black and white picture of a goat with googly eyes attached right next to our table – box checked! I had blueberry pancakes with a side of home fries and it made me do my happy food dance. The service was friendly and fantastic and I look forward to going back in the future.

Next we moved on to One-Eighty Consignment & Thrift Shoppe. Now, if you know anything about me at all, you know your girl loves a thrift store. This place is packed with tidy, well-curated finds. They know what they have but the prices are fair

and there are treasures aplenty to be found. It's two floors of fun with literally something for everyone. I snagged a North Face fleece for my daughter and a Lands End jacket for myself for just a buck apiece. I plan to go back soon to check out the assortment of vintage kitchen and glassware. The real bonus though is that the owner's two dogs, who are featured in the store's marketing, were on-site behind the counter and greeting shoppers during checkout.

Before we headed home, we stopped at Albion Marketplace. The former Shurfine was mentioned as a can't-miss place for "cronut" type doughnuts from the in-store bakery – they did not disappoint. But the biggest surprise at the marketplace was that, as part of their redesign, they are assembling a vast array of Asian foods. We spent some time checking out the truly huge variety of items and took home some ginger drink pack-

ets and my new favorite condiment obsession: mushroom soy sauce. We enjoyed our morning out in the country and I heartily suggest taking a drive out soon as a peaceful respite from the holiday bustle.

*Big Irene's Little Diner – 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday with fixed menu dinner Fridays from 4 to 7 p.m. // 79 E. State St., Albion*

*One-Eighty Consignment & Thrift Shoppe – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays // 10 E. State St., Albion*

*Albion Marketplace – 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily // 23 E. State St., Albion*

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



If you've never visited the borough of Albion in Erie County, take a tip from Edwina and try it! With a hearty dinor breakfast, a fun thrift experience, and some locally made donuts, you'll find lots to love in Albion.

## Making a Small City Smaller: Mutual Aid and the Ongoing Attack on our Social Safety Net

Why our collective effort to lift up our neighbors builds community, saves lives in Erie

By: David Tamulonis

In a shocking report last month by *The New Yorker*, the elimination of USAID by the now-defunct Department of Government Efficiency (or DOGE, the Elon Musk meme name for the department that feels like it was founded seven lifetimes ago already) has already contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people in what the author Atul Gawande described as “public man-made death.” While USAID worked globally to address completely avoidable plagues of malnutrition, effectively dropping the rates of malnutrition-related deaths in some sub-Saharan African countries from over 20 percent to under 1 percent with simple interventions, our own country is also facing completely avoidable crises of malnutrition, hunger, and lack of access to healthcare and necessary resources. If the destruction of USAID taught us anything, it’s how important our social safety net really is to millions of people, both here in America and across the world.

Last month also saw a public meltdown by Erie County Executive Brenton Davis following his loss to Christina Vogel, in which he decided to veto several changes to the proposed county budget, some approved unanimously by members of County Council. Vetoes included monies for the Human Relations Commission, the Booker T. Washington Center, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center, and the Urban Erie Community Development Center. He also reduced the funds for public safety grants and underfunded the Pleasant Ridge Manor senior care facility. Davis’ impact on our county resources will thankfully be short-lived, but it lays bare the most basic underlying principle of MAGAnomics: the cruelty is the point. All the hand-wringing over culture war nonsense makes sense when you recognize it for what it is: a distraction from their main policy objective, which is to simply hurt people who are not rich.

A little background on Brenton Davis if you have been living under a rock in Erie for the past four years: Christina Vogel beat Brenton Davis,



The folks behind the mutual aid group See You Next Tuesday helped install and stock a little free pantry outside of Ember + Forge cafe on Fourth and State streets – full of donated food items from the community to help offset food insecurity for the neighbors in the downtown area.

a one-term incumbent Erie County Executive, by nearly 20,000 votes, an astonishing margin in Erie for a political newcomer. Davis, who spent energy in the primary to help Vogel beat Perry Wood (thinking she would be the weaker candidate to face in the general), acted as though he had this election in the bag. That makes Vogel’s victory so much more satisfying for Erie County voters and so much more humiliating for Brenton Davis. Vogel is an intelligent, hard-working woman and I do not want to take away from her achievements and the campaign she ran against him, but Brenton Davis lost this election all by himself. He likely would have lost to anyone. And that gives us all a little bit of hope.

By most reasonable measures used to analyze his tenure, Brenton Davis was the worst Erie County Executive in recent history. He became embroiled in multiple lawsuits

over his budgets and his attempts to block equity initiatives, including suits by Erie County Council and Diverse Erie, made claims about his military record that were later challenged by local media and veterans as misleading, messed around with the county budget, cut funding across the board for necessary county services like housing and senior care, used county social media as his personal political megaphone, and a former girlfriend of Davis was granted a temporary Protection from Abuse order for her and two temporary Protections from Intimidation orders for her two children, which a judge later declined to extend. Most times he opened his mouth, boilerplate MAGA copy-pasta or misogynistic garbage would stream out. Over the course of four years, he alienated constituents, donors, partners, colleagues, and others who wanted to see the county succeed.

Gratefully, the people of Erie County actually held him accountable at the ballot box this November.

It was almost refreshing and kind of quaint, in a small-town way, to imagine people coming to their senses and shaking off the MAGA spell for long enough to give Davis the boot. But we did it. And since we did it, in the most purple county in the most purple state, others can certainly do it. And if others can do it, maybe more dominoes will fall. Accountability is back, baby!

Similar to the destruction of USAID and other arms of our social safety net by DOGE, Davis’ cuts were never about saving us taxpayers any money (we’re still waiting on that DOGE refund check, right?) they are about manufacturing cruelty and death where there once was a helping hand. They are about dividing the working class and weakening our political and financial power, reducing



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### NEIGHBORHOOD VOICES

our ability to mount resistance. That, both fortunately and unfortunately, is where mutual aid can step in and literally save peoples' lives.

While I am usually hesitant to accept a narrative of personal responsibility for large problems that were created by industrial capitalism (like climate change), this is a situation where the interventions of a few individuals can actually make a huge difference for your neighbors. Erie has seen several amazing examples of mutual aid in the past year that have filled in gaps left by the pause in SNAP benefits, the rising costs of healthcare, and the rapidly worsening housing crisis in our city. Mutual aid, defined very broadly, is the voluntary, peer-to-peer exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit. It can take on many forms, from food drives to the free sharing of skills with others. It is the embodiment of Mr. Fred Rogers' ethos (or

growing group of volunteers toward several community service projects including the Little Free Pantry at Ember+Forge and a water distribution table in Perry Square during this summer's heat wave. Volunteers have also helped out at several initiatives like the Pay-What-You-Can markets and this Fall's Community Dinner. See You Next Tuesday is also committed to in-person monthly meetings where members of the community can visit and share projects that require volunteer support. If you're interested in joining See You Next Tuesday and participating in mutual aid projects in Erie, please email [seyounexttuesday.erie@gmail.com](mailto:seyounexttuesday.erie@gmail.com).

The in-person service projects also fight back at the various distractions lobbed our way through social media echo chambers, where we tend to spend much of our time these days. It is much harder to see a neighbor

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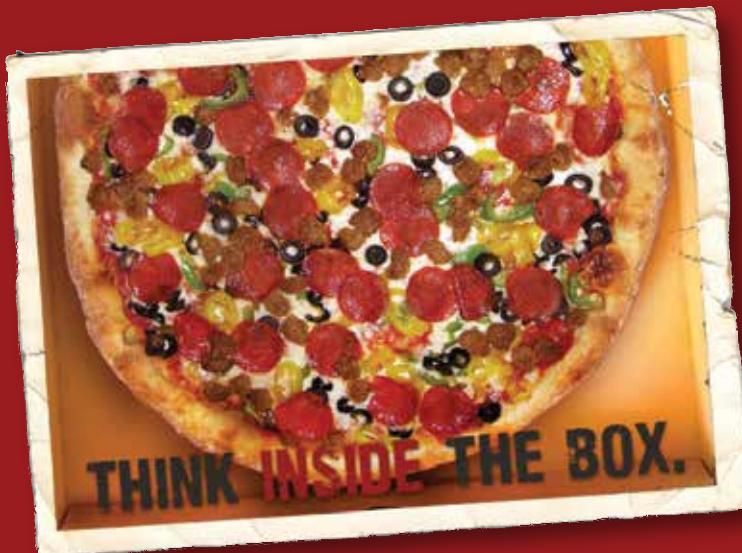
Mutual aid, defined very broadly, is the voluntary, peer-to-peer exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit. It can take on many forms, from food drives to the free sharing of skills with others. It is the embodiment of Mr. Fred Rogers' ethos (or God's, if you're religious): help your neighbor.

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God's, if you're religious): help your neighbor. One important takeaway is that this aid takes place outside of the traditional networks of aid like government assistance or nonprofit charity. Mutual aid operates on solidarity and horizontal relationships, whereas charity often creates a hierarchy between giver and receiver. Mutual aid assumes your neighbor also has something to give you in return, building long-term, resilient communities instead of immediate, temporary relief. Many charities could learn a lot from a model built on solidarity and reciprocity in their quests to create programming that maintains the dignity of the populations they serve. Because of this, the group in Erie spearheading a lot of this work, See You Next Tuesday, doesn't have a leadership structure. A group of concerned citizens including Rie Witherow, Jessica Shultz, Caleb Rechten, Starla Cochenour, and several more have shepherded a

as your enemy on the manufactured culture war battlefield if you spent Saturday morning delivering aid to free pantries with them. Coming together in person and working toward a shared goal is great for building strong social bonds across our community as well as helping boost your mood and self-esteem. In an environment this bleak, every little action helps. Your anger and frustration are best spent making good things happen in real life, not typing with your thumbs. This holiday season, if you're wondering how to give back, consider getting involved in mutual aid projects. The work being done is not only saving peoples' lives, it is doing so with dignity and respect for our shared experience on this Earth.

*David Tamulonis is a musician and educator who works at Erie Downtown Partnership managing community events and activities in Downtown Erie. He can be reached at [davidtamulonis@gmail.com](mailto:davidtamulonis@gmail.com).*



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## Take Your Beer For a Walk: A Festivus For the Rest of Us

An oaty stroll through mid-town ends with a singularly unique holiday tradition

By: Jeff McCullor

Ah, December. We made it! You should celebrate with a frosty local beer and a casual jaunt through our fair city to continue taking full advantage of our open container privileges. We're going to double dip this month and go for our usual guided walk through town and end up at a certain venue hosting a marquee holiday event. You could say it's a Festivus miracle!

Alright, so grab your container, make it open, and let's begin at the corner of West 12th and Sassafras streets, home to the Erie Times-News since 1970. Erie's lone full scale news publication enjoyed many a decade as our town's most comprehensive news source publishing not one, but two newspapers daily. The building was once bustling with so many people it felt like it may bust at the seams, an environment that's quite different now. Cheers to you, hardworking folks of the once-regal Erie Times-News!

Next let's walk south along Sassafras, under the railroad viaduct that's been wonderfully painted by artists sponsored by Logistics Plus. We want to end up at 1626 Sass, home to Larry's Central Market, a third-generation neighborhood grocer that's been in business at this location since 1963. Larry's arguably makes some of the best sausages in town and provides much-needed grocery services for the Little Italy neighborhood in which it resides. The proper slogan "Nobody Beats Larry's

Meat" (chuckle) is printed on t-shirts inside the store and makes a great Christmas gift. Cheers to you, Larry's Central Market!

From Larry's corner, turn around in place so you face due east. The crazy-big plaza across the street once held Erie's first fully-enclosed shopping mall, appropriately dubbed the Erie Central Mall. Clever, huh? Opened in 1963, it was part of an "urban renewal project" that included inviting large chain retailers directly into the urban core, an ironic departure from our community's current efforts of prioritizing local shopping. Now the entire building serves all sorts of tenants and provides a great parking lot for doing donuts in the winter (don't get busted!). Cheers to you, former Erie Central Mall!

Next, let's walk around the block shall we? Grab a few sips along the way because we want to walk south to West 18th Street, then east to Peach Street, then north heading under the second railroad viaduct of the day. We want to end up at the corner of West 14th and Peach streets, home to The Brewerie at Union Station, Erie's original brewpub and home to Festivus on Dec. 23.

From your vantage point at the corner, you'll see a series of tall windows facing Griswold Park and behind those windows is the Grand Concourse at Union Station, home to Festivus 2025 on Dec. 23, where you'll enjoy a slew of time-honored *Seinfeld*-based tra-

CONTRIBUTED



Take your beer for a chilly walk with Jeff McCullor as he explores the Griswold area, eventually ending up at the annual Festivus celebration happening on Dec. 23 at the Concourse at Union Station.

ditions to make this holiday event unlike any other. It's a perfect scenario to either bring (or ditch) your family before the holidays get into full swing.

In its 10th year, Festivus loads up your dance card with local bands, food, beer, and cocktails interspersed through the programming featuring: Feats of Strength, the Airing of Grievances, and the time-honored Festivus pole. Emceed by local comedian Anthony Morelli, it's a time to cut loose and enjoy a full night of pop culture alongside great friends and hilarity. Local bands include Eastern Recluse, SANIS, and Vices, with food from The Que Abides Pit Stop and drinks from Erie Ale Works and The Brewerie at Union Station. As usual, Matt Lebowitz will host *Seinfeld* trivia (study up on Season Three).

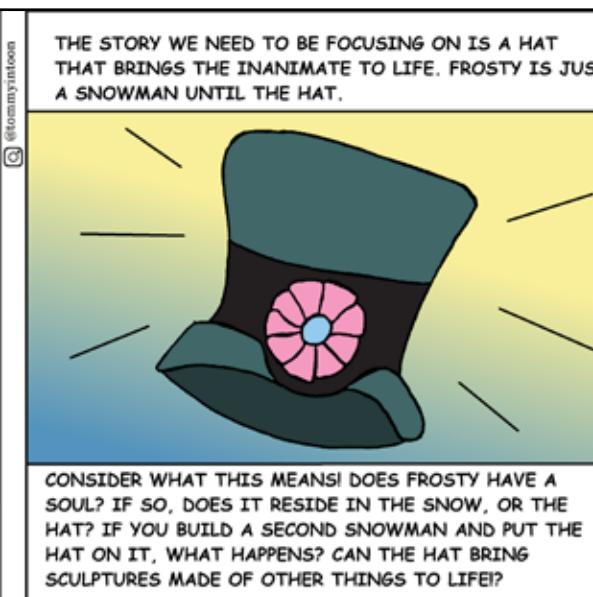
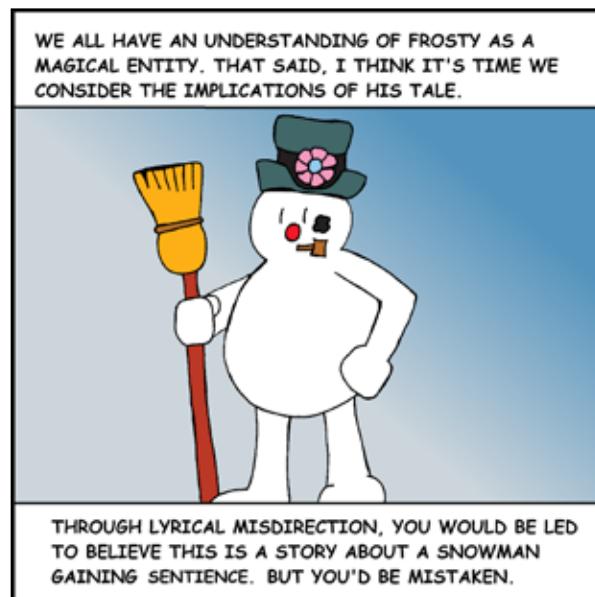
Oh, and one more thing is up the col-

lective sleeves of Erie Ale Works and The Brewerie – a collaboration beer to further enhance your celebratory mood while partying with the rest of us. A special India Pale Ale is in the works and will be unveiled at Festivus. Maybe you can take a pint of this IPA for a walk some day?

Phew, that was a lot. Thanks for being cool and coming on a walk with me, and be sure to check out the 10th Annual Festivus!

Festivus takes place on Tuesday, Dec. 23 // 5 to 10 p.m. // The Concourse at Union Station, 123 W. 14th St. // \$12 in advance, \$15 at the door // For tickets and info: [eriealeworks.com](http://eriealeworks.com)

Jeff McCullor is the co-owner of Erie Ale Works. He can be reached at [jeff@eriealeworks.com](mailto:jeff@eriealeworks.com)



## The Reader Beat Monthly Recap

A summary of November meetings

By: Alana Sabol

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

**City Council Nov. 5:** During public comments, constituent Robert Takecs, who uses a wheelchair, explained that sidewalks are not being maintained well enough for him to be able to use them. "I have been pulled over by cops 24-7 for riding on the streets in my wheelchair," he said. "How can I ride on the sidewalk when all the sidewalks are all broken up?" During reports, Councilmember Jasmine Flores advocated for better pedestrian access in the city. "Getting pulled over while trying to get around the city is unacceptable," Flores said.

An ordinance appropriating \$25,000 from a Community Partnerships Program Grant administered by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) passed unanimously.

**County Council Nov. 6:** Constituents shared their thoughts on the upcoming 2026 budget with the council. Constituent Malcolm Pulliam requested possible funding for body cameras. "I am hoping and praying that you guys put that to action," Pulliam said, then referencing Marchello Woodard's death by a parole officer. "This situation probably would be a closed case deal if those two gentlemen had on body cams." In his report, Andre Horton reflected on his past 12 years on county council as he will now serve on city council following his election win. "Representation matters and to be celebrated for being the first and only person of color to ever be elected to any county position in the 225 years of the county is both humbling and sad at the same time," said Horton.

A resolution for the approval of a \$4,000 transfer of funds from the Public Defender Budget to multiple General Fund Budgets passed unanimously. Rock Copeland provided clarity on this resolution, saying: "From time to time in our various budgets you have unspent money, that doesn't necessarily mean you didn't invest in

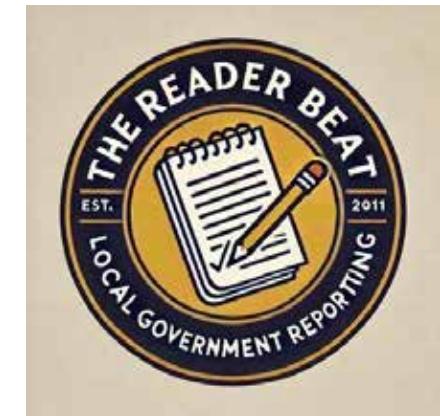
those services or you weren't delivering those services. A lot of times you can't fill every job so you have money left over in a lot of different budgets."

**City Council Nov. 19:** Speakers during public comments encouraged the council to consider a community police advisory board in light of the death of Marchello Woodard. Since Woodard was shot by a state parole officer in July, no arrests or charges have been made. Some constituents discussed town halls happening throughout the city to address inequalities among community members, like No Hate in Our State. Shateria Franklin, 40 Under 40 Class of 2023, founder of Destiny of Our Daughters, and mother of Marchello Woodard's youngest

streets. Councilmember Flores expressed concern about the apartment building potentially blocking the view of the water for current residents in the area. Constituent Chanel Caljean mentioned that Erie is a community-centric city but did not see any shared community space on the building's grounds. Constituent Martha Nwachukwu (Erie's 40 Under 40 Class of 2019) brought up the historical and cultural significance of the neighborhood for the BIPOC community and encouraged the developers to consider it in their planning.

**County Council Nov. 20:** During this meeting, council passed the 2026 budget with some significant amendments. Some constituents commented on those amendments, discussing the lack of resources in lower east side neighborhoods and low pay for county employees. Constituent Jerry Roberts highlighted the small portion of the 2026 budget given to the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Commission (Diverse Erie) in the amount of \$500,000. He also discussed how the county failed to give the commission the proposed sum of \$10 million when it was created in 2021 and to date the commission has only received half of that funding. "Today, Diverse Erie only received \$5 million of the \$10 million that was promised. Erie County declared racism as an emergency crisis and it has not been treated as an emergency. I'm asking that Diverse Erie, Erie's Black Wall Street, and community centers be fully funded." Councilmember Andre Horton echoed Roberts' statements and stated that he would like to see the full \$10 million allocated to the commission in future budgets. "Equity and inclusion are very different things, and clearly the BIPOC community hasn't been included in any investment; in fact, our communities have been disinvested," Horton said.

Council addressed the 2026 budget, reviewed amendments, and approved a .33-millage property tax increase in order to balance the budget. They also allocated funds to programs and organizations such as Diverse Erie, Erie Black Wall Street, and voted to supply body cameras to law enforcement and probation departments.



Following the approval of the 2026 budget by council in a vote of 4-3, with Bayle, Schauerman, and Winarski voting no, County Executive Brenton Davis vetoed over \$1 million in funding for Diverse Erie, Erie's Black Wall Street, and more.

**City Council Dec. 3:** Public comments addressed the resolution brought forward by council to acknowledge the death of Marchello Woodard and to ask for updates regarding the status of the investigation and to release information to the public to the fullest extent permitted by law. Constituent Shateria Franklin, mother of Woodard's youngest son, urged council to pass the resolution, saying: "We hold positions of power to make change, not to make a name for ourselves, not to build our pockets up, but to actually make change." Constituent Susannah Faulkner suggested that a member or members of city council go to Harrisburg to meet with Governor Josh Shapiro, who has not responded to the letter Mayor Joe Schember and council sent in July regarding Woodard's death. "You have entry into rooms we do not," Faulkner said. During committee reports, Tyler Titus committed to making the trip to Harrisburg to meet with Shapiro.

The resolution requesting transparency and timely public updates regarding the death of Marchello Woodard and the ongoing investigation by the Erie County District Attorney and the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole passed unanimously.

### Coming up this month:

**County Council:** Dec. 9 at 6 p.m.

**City Council:** Dec. 17 at 6:30 p.m.

## Gem City Style: Year in Review

An interview with Kim Nguyen, owner of Sandcille Spa

By: Jessica Hunter

They say a lot can happen in a year. For Kim Nguyen, the last 12 months haven't just been about the passage of time – they have been a lesson in "sink or swim."

As we look back on 2025 for our Year in Review, few stories capture the spirit of evolution quite like Nguyen's. A little over a year ago, she officially closed on the purchase of SandCille Spa, transitioning from an employee to the owner of one of Erie's staple beauty destinations.

But to understand the weight of this milestone, you have to understand where Nguyen comes from.

"I felt like I really gave up a good portion of my twenties to work really hard, because that's the culture," Nguyen says, reflecting on her early years in the nail industry. "If you didn't work seven days a week, you weren't a hard worker."

That work ethic is in her DNA. Raised by her father, a refugee from Vietnam who lived in a camp in Hong Kong before immigrating to the States – first California, then Arlington and Philadelphia, and eventually spending his summers in Erie. He built a life on hustle and humility.

"My dad is a very humble, very content person," she explains. But recently, the magnitude of her success hit home during a dinner at The Cork. "We were sitting out on the patio, and he looked at me straight-faced and said, 'Never in my life would I think that when I moved to this country I'd be sitting at this restaurant with you, my daughter, paying for it.'"

In Vietnamese culture, Nguyen notes, there is a sentiment that true prosperity is when you surpass your parents. "You always want your kids to be better than you. That was his proudest moment."

However, the road from hardworking daughter to "Boss Lady" wasn't a straight line. After leaving her previous salon, she found herself at a crossroads. Through the Erie grapevine, she connected with Rae Jean, the previous owner of SandCille.

It started with coffee at Brew Ha Ha. It wasn't a formal interview, but a meeting of minds. Rae saw potential in Nguyen, eventually renovating a room at the spa specifically for her

JESSICA HUNTER



Jessica Hunter invited Kim Nguyen to her downtown studio where they discussed her family history, her work ethic, and her vision for the future of the spa.

acrylic work and mentoring her on the business. When Rae announced she was selling, Nguyen raised her hand.

"I didn't even know what I was doing," Nguyen laughs. "I was just like, 'Yeah!'"

The reality check came swiftly. Nguyen originally planned to buy the business with a partner, but he bailed deep into the process. "I was terrified," she admits. "I didn't know if I could handle it on my own... But I'm kind of a sink or swim person. I was already in this. I had to do this."

One year later, she hasn't just swum; she is steering the ship.

While she admits the title of "owner" still feels surreal – partly because she is still "in the field" taking clients Monday through Friday – the changes she has made speak volumes. She has curated a team that feels like family, hired a spa manager to help facilitate growth, and shifted the atmosphere to be more fun and relaxed.

"I just wanted to make it me," she says.

Part of that identity is ensuring clients leave feeling their best, especially as the long Erie winter settles in. Nguyen points to the hydrafacial as a seasonal essential, calling it "very hydrating and refreshing" – the perfect antidote to dry winter air. For those looking to decompress during the holiday rush, massage therapy remains a top recommendation.

But true to her roots in the industry, Nguyen admits the classics are still her personal favorite form of self-care. Whether it's fresh manicures and pedicures or detailed lash lifts and brow laminations, the goal is for every client to walk out feeling polished and confident.

Looking toward the future of SandCille, Nguyen would like her vision to shift from purely aesthetic to holistic wellness. "I would really like to get into the health portion of beauty," she reveals, dreaming up plans for an infrared sauna and a focus on "clean and green" products like the Pevonia line currently used at the spa. It is a

philosophy she embodies in her own life, too. When she needs to recharge, Nguyen turns to hot yoga to maintain a healthy mind-body connection. As she puts it, "If you look good, you feel good."

For Nguyen, this year has been about conquering fear. If she could go back and give advice to the Kim of one year ago, it would be simple: "Don't be so scared."

As Erie heads into a new year, Nguyen stands as a testament to the power of taking the leap. She is no longer just the hard worker grinding seven days a week; she is the owner creating a legacy of her own.

For more info on Sandcille Spa's services and products, visit [sandcille.com](http://sandcille.com)

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

## Erie's Year in Review: 1975

A look back at a monumental year in Erie, 50 years ago

By: Jonathan Burdick

Well, 1975 is coming to an end and, boy, what a year it's been. The world population has surpassed 4 billion, the U.S. national debt reached a staggering \$530 billion (can you believe it), and unemployment peaked at 9 percent in May (and has since barely come down).

But hey, let's start with the good news. It was an exciting start of the year for Pennsylvanians. In January, the Pittsburgh Steelers defeated the Minnesota Vikings to win their first Super Bowl. Franco Harris earned MVP, while quarterback Terry Bradshaw said they won it for owner Art Rooney, the "greatest man who ever walked." In baseball news, the Pirates won the National League East once again, the fifth time in six years, while the Pittsburgh Penguins (who some speculated were relocating to Seattle) also made the playoffs.

In the NBA, the Golden State Warriors defeated the Washington Bullets, while the American Basketball Association (ABA) with those crazy three-point shots looks like it's off to an interesting start this season – although many here stopped paying attention after Pittsburgh's team folded in '72. That Julius Erving is quite something though. And how about that Thrilla in Manila between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier? You could watch it on some cable TV channel called HBO, but I was stuck hearing about it on the radio the next morning.

Meanwhile in Erie, the Blades ice hockey team debuted. Despite having a strong team, attendance at the Erie County Field House was consistently weak. Even on free puck night, only a dismal 741 showed up. Heck, hockey teams in smaller cities aver-

age 3,000. In a letter to the Erie Daily Times, one Erieite scolded local sports fans to "wake up" before the "title contender" Blades packed up and moved elsewhere.

There's a few new shows everybody's been talking about around the water cooler. Folks seem to really enjoy *Wheel of Fortune*, but that whole *Saturday Night Live* thing that the kids seem to love? Some grown man pretending to be Mighty Mouse? There's no way that show lasts. The Hollywood Reporter thinks it's "lackluster" and in need of an "immediate upgrading of the comedy material." *The Jeffersons* is a pretty groovy spin-off to *All in the Family* though, even if not everybody thinks so. A recent column printed in the Erie Daily Times said its portrayal of interracial marriage on television will only "fan the flame of hatred" and set "integration back 10 years in one night."

The Academy Awards was hosted by Bob Hope, Shirley MacLaine, Sammy Davis Jr., and Frank Sinatra in April. *The Godfather Part II* was the clear favorite from last year. This year had quite a few good movies to enjoy, too: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* – and then, of course, *Jaws*, from that relative newcomer Steven Spielberg. In the Times-News Weekender, our local critic was impressed by Spielberg's direction and the movie's "uniformly excellent" performances, but added that it "peaked too soon" and the second act fell flat. I politely disagree.

Erie's love of rock music was on full display at the Erie County Fieldhouse this year. Concerts included Aerosmith, Rush, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Fleetwood Mac, Three Dog Night, ZZ Top, KISS, Crosby & Nash, and Johnny and June Carter Cash. Sorry disco fans. You'll have to get your dancing fix at Wooden Horse Lounge or Gadsby's.

Waldameer Park owner Paul Nelson said the park had a very successful 79th season with the best opening in two decades. "For youngsters, one word synonymous with 'summer' is good old 'Waldameer,'" the newspaper said. They had two new attractions for kids: the Moon Walk and the Umbrella Ride. For Elsa Herrick, 83, this was her

CONTRIBUTED



The Millcreek Mall opened in Erie 50 years ago, in 1975, and eventually changed the economy of the City of Erie and the look and feel of the Kearsarge area.

50th season working there and she loves fondly recounting stories about all of the pranks she and her coworkers would play on each other back in the day.

Then, of course, we have to discuss it: the absolutely exhausting topic of politics. I know it's not polite to discuss in public, but next year is a presidential election and Gerald Ford plans to run on the Republican ticket again. He is being challenged by actor-turned-politician Ronald Reagan. On the Democratic Party side, that relatively unknown governor and peanut farmer from Georgia Jimmy Carter has been campaigning all year in an already crowded primary field. Many hope for Sen. Hubert Humphrey to run again, but it seems more and more unlikely. Whoever wins though is going to have to deal with this recession and the loss of over 2 million jobs these past two years.

It's probably no surprise after the last decade, but public trust in the government has fallen to record lows. Under Eisenhower, Kennedy, and, well, at least the beginning of Johnson's presidency, nearly 75 percent of Americans polled by Gallup said "they trust the government to do what is right just about always/most of the time." Now, that number hovers around 33 percent.

Let's be honest: the nation still hasn't healed from Watergate – not to mention the controversial pardoning of Richard Nixon by President Ford last year. Twice as many Americans op-

posed the pardon than supported it, so it was no surprise then when Ford's approval rating tanked 21 points overnight. While Nixon's cronies are still getting sentenced as part of the cover-up, one seething letter-to-the-editor says the pardon proves Ford isn't a humble servant of God, but a humble servant of Nixon.

"We have always feared that there was one law and scale of punishment for the rich and powerful and a totally different law and scale of punishment for the poor and deprived," the letter continued. "Now President Ford has proved it. ... His premature pardon has destroyed any possibility of believing in the justice and fairness of the law." There were even two close-call attempts on President Ford's life this year. Thankfully, he's okay.

Then, of course, there is Vietnam. In April, Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese Army. In 1965, only 25 percent of polled Americans felt it was a mistake to send our troops there. By 1973, that had climbed to 60 percent. For many, Saigon's fall was a painful end to a war that divided the country and resulted in so much death and suffering across Southeast Asia. Erie itself had 40 young men who died in the war.

Meanwhile, images of disabled and struggling veterans being neglected are still fresh in people's minds while there is also increasing pushback over the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees, even ones already stateside. Sen. George McGovern, a fervent op-



In 1975, Gerald Ford was POTUS and infamously pardoned Richard Nixon. He was then primaried by Ronald Reagan, and eventually replaced the following year by incoming Democrat Jimmy Carter.

ERIE DAILY TIMES

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The Erie County Fieldhouse had a banner year in 1975 when it hosted the likes of Aerosmith, Rush, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Three Dog Night, ZZ Top, KISS, Crosby & Nash, Johnny and June Carter Cash, and, as mentioned in this ad in the Erie Daily Times, Fleetwood Mac.

ponent to the war who'd lost the 1972 election to Nixon, argued that most refugees left Vietnam in a premature panic and should go back. "I fully believe it will be to the best interests of the Vietnam refugees to return to their

own country," he recently said. I wonder if they feel the same way.

Here in Erie County, tensions have been high between elected officials of the city and Millcreek Township. The source of contention? The opening of the Millcreek Mall, one of the nation's largest indoor shopping malls. Its opening has certainly enthralled some, but it's concerned others. At a recent meeting, Erie City Council proposed annexing Millcreek Township. Of course, township supervisors scoffed at the idea.

"We've been considering annexing the City of Erie, but we're not going to do it because of their deficit," quipped Millcreek Supervisor Gerald Salisbury.

"The greatest thing that happened was the opening of the Millcreek Mall, which will start pouring tax money into the township and county," defended Millcreek Supervisor Paul J. Martin. He added that it will help Millcreek keep a balanced budget and increase services.

"It's ridiculous," Millcreek Supervisor J.R. Bricker said. "They're just mad because we're growing and they're not."

City residents understandably worry

about the mall's economic impact on downtown, but defenders insist it will only be a secondary shopping area, not a replacement. It doesn't boost anybody's confidence when we hear the news of Marx Toys closing its Erie plant by the end of the year and the 440 employees losing their jobs.

In July, around 60,000 state employees went on strike affecting services across Erie. In the midst of tourist season, Presque Isle State Park shut down. Numerous liquor stores closed. In one Erie office, only 30 of its 190 employees showed up. "Down with the bourgeoisie, up with the peons," one striking PennDOT worker's picket sign said. While the strike only lasted a few days before bargaining recommenced, it's a big deal. This was the first major strike by a union against a state government and it resulted in a pay raise of 12 percent over the next three years (as opposed to the 3.5 percent offered in the governor's budget proposal).

In August, Erie was shaken by the horrific murder of 16-year-old Debbie Gama. Then in November, the SS *Edmund Fitzgerald* sank on Lake Superior, killing all 29 aboard. While

it wasn't our lake, the tragedy hit too close to home for many. One Erieite had even toured the ship only a few months prior, meeting some of the crew. "The sinking forcibly reminds us of the obvious — that the sea kills people," a joint statement released by the unions of those who perished stated, adding that folks must stop viewing "sailing as a romanticized ideal, and to begin thinking of it as a highly skilled, difficult, and trying occupation performed by persons who have homes and families and loved ones, and who seek life, not death."

In other news, I've been reading this new book written by this former English teacher from Maine named Stephen King. It's called *Salem's Lot*. My friend said his first book *Carrie* is disturbingly enjoyable. I heard they're turning it into a movie next year. Far out.

Well, 1975 has certainly been a memorable and turbulent year here in Erie. Who knows what 1976 — or the next 50 years — has in store?

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



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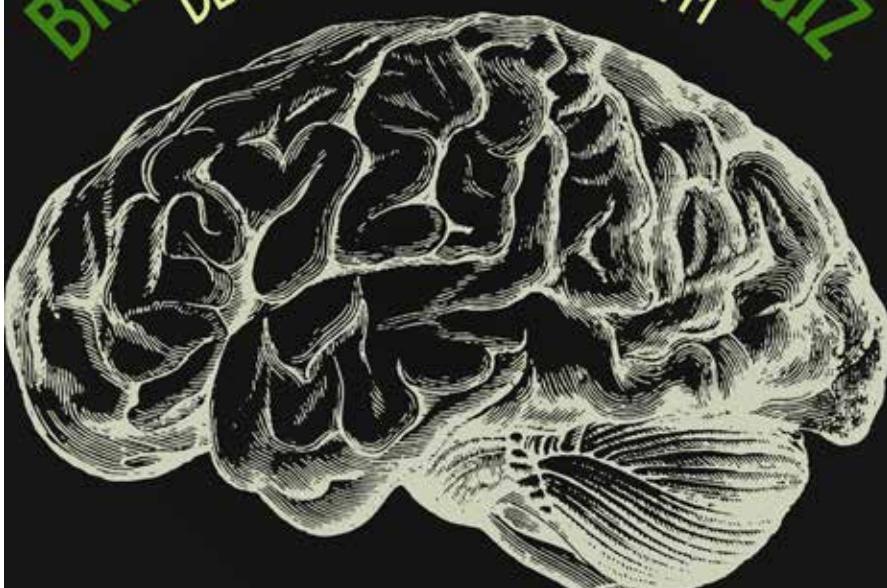
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## EVENTS

**1020 Collective Hosts Third Annual Holiday Bazaar**

Traditions solidify over local shopping on Gallery Night

BEGINNING FRIDAY, DEC. 12

Perhaps you've been to the Holiday Bazaar at 1020 Collective in years past, and if you're lucky enough to have attended, you know that by design the bazaar takes place during Gallery Night. This shrewd move made by co-director Sarah Moody encourages a tradition where local entrepreneurs and artists connect with a supportive community of holiday shoppers. Moody comments, "We have many repeat vendors year after year, so we are already seeing a tradition happening in that regard."

This will be the biggest bazaar yet, featuring works from over 50 vendors including Madison Rose Ceramics, Book Forge, Shay's Butta, The Nesting Doll, and Rabiiit 3 by André Jones.

"We love supporting our local community full of wonderful artists, crafts people, and entrepreneurs so we thought we'd start a night bazaar

during the holiday shopping rush to give vendors and shoppers a fun opportunity to connect," says Moody.

Additionally, this year's attendees



The 1020 Collective will be hosting their third annual Holiday Bazaar during the upcoming Erie Art Museum Gallery Night, combining an art and shopping experience.

will have a chance to participate in a unique offering – the collaboratively organized Psychic Parlor co-hosted by Jena Rose Briceland aka Phoenix Fern, an opportunity to connect with healers and psychics. Located within the second floor gallery, guests may arrive to receive healing treatments for themselves, or purchase gift cards for sharing these services with loved ones.

A full musical lineup along with festive libations and small bites for purchase will be available during the bazaar. Whether you're seeking to find deeper meaning at the Psychic Parlor or dancing while enjoying the galleries, you're sure to support the creativity of the community while choosing to shop small. – Erica Stewart

Friday, Dec. 12 from 5 to 10 p.m. and Saturday, Dec. 13 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. // 1020 Collective, 1020 Holland St. // For more info: 1020collective.com

**See *Frozen* at the Erie Playhouse**

For the first time in forever

CONTINUING FRIDAY, DEC. 12

The snow has already begun to fly in earnest here in Erie, marking the start of the winter season (in climate, if not yet on the calendar). And while it's cold out there, the Erie Playhouse is capturing a wintry wonderland on its stage, as one of the first community theaters in the country to produce the contemporary Disney classic musical *Frozen*. According to the Playhouse's artistic director, as well as the director and choreographer for this adaptation Richard Davis, the theater is pulling out all the stops to bring this magical story to life.

"Disney musicals always require our design team to push and stretch their creative muscles," he said. "A talking snowman, a reindeer, multiple magical transformations, and snow are only the [tip of the] iceberg of challenges." Still, the creative and technical team, which includes Ryan Ingram, assisted by Crystal Corritore for costumes, as well as Nico Lombardo, Brandon Daugherty, and Rick Frendt for stage design and props, has pooled their collective genius to create visuals

which will leave audiences stunned and delighted.

Complementing the visual aspect of the show, Davis also praised the musical element of the Playhouse's *Frozen*. "We have assembled [an] all-star cast led by Playhouse veterans Leah Johnson and Nicole Lossie as Elsa and Anna," he enthused. Along with Robert Stepnowski (Kristoff) in his Playhouse stage debut, Dylan Vergotz (Hans), Kyle Filbeck (Olaf), and Zeke Walker and John Flemming (sharing the role of Sven), "the sound of the cast" under the direction of music coordinator Devon Yates (who also leads the live orchestra) "is thrilling," according to Davis.

With tickets sure to sell out for many of the performances, be sure to secure your seat, take a break from the holiday hustle and bustle, and "let it go" for a few magical hours. – Cara Suppa

Continuing weekends from Dec. 12 through Jan. 4 // 7:30 p.m. or 2 p.m. // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. // \$19.40-\$30.40 // For tickets and info: erieplayhouse.org



Join the cast of the Erie Playhouse's production of *Frozen*, running now through the beginning of January. This is one of the first community theater productions in the country of this Disney musical, and the folks at the Playhouse are pulling out all the stops to make it as magical as possible.



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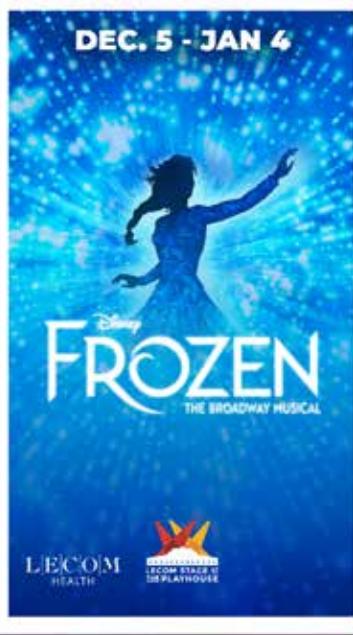
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## Oh, What a Sight – It's Presque Isle Lights!

The holiday favorite sets sights on a new layout for 2025

CONTINUING FRIDAY, DEC. 12

This holiday season, pack everyone in the car and bring the whole crew down to Presque Isle to enjoy the park after dark with Presque Isle Lights.

Now in its fifth year, the park is updating their light displays for 2025 to pack a bigger punch. Since weather can play such a big part in accessibility on the roads, the drive through the park will look a bit different this year. "We decided to condense all of the lights and displays to the front side of the peninsula," said Jon DeMarco, executive director of Presque Isle Partnership. "This creates a brighter, more concentrated experience and helps ensure the displays remain accessible throughout the month."

Rather than circling the entire peninsula, the tour route will now turn around at the Duck Pond crossover near Beach 8, where the road forms a Y. However, visitors are still welcome to access the whole park, as the Presque Isle Lighthouse (which is not located on the official tour route)



The Presque Isle Partnership invites Erieites to take a festive drive around the peninsula this holiday season to enjoy their fifth annual installation of Presque Isle Lights.

will also be decorated.

The event is free to the public, but donations are welcome to help support the park's year-round efforts. Donations can be made at the Cookhouse Pavilion parking lot, located in the Waterworks Area. For each \$5 donation, visitors will receive a commemorative Presque Isle Lights button and they can register for a chance to win a \$1,000 Country Fair gas card.

The magic of the lights and displays is second only to the magic of those who help make the event possible:

"Presque Isle Lights is completely volunteer-driven, and our volunteers take tremendous pride in bringing it all together," said DeMarco. "I really enjoy the time spent outdoors with them – we share a lot of laughs, get plenty of fresh air, and it's a great reminder of how much community spirit goes into making this happen."

—Ally Kutz

Dusk to 9 p.m., Friday, Dec. 5 through Sunday, Dec. 28 // Free to public, donations welcome // For more information, visit [discoverpi.com](http://discoverpi.com)

## Find Your Holiday Spirit with Erie's Nutcracker Reimagined

Lake Erie Ballet's locally themed version of a Christmas classic returns to Warner Theatre

BEGINNING SATURDAY, DEC. 13

The Nutcracker Suite has been a holiday tradition for generations. In Erie, the first production was in 1957 by Erie Civic Ballet (ECB) and began a long history of Erieites celebrating the season with a trip to the Warner to see the ballet. And now, the Lake Erie Ballet Company (LEBC) stages the classic ballet with a local twist, bringing dancers together from all over Erie for the show through collaboration with Corella Productions, Marguerite's Academy of Dance, NWPA Collegiate Academy, and Sovereign Ballet.

Christina Maria, LEBC artistic director and director of Sovereign Ballet school, is at the helm for the production and carries an impressive resume and deep love for Erie. Beginning her dance training in Detroit, Maria continued in Dallas, New York City, San Francisco, and Boston before joining Lake Erie Ballet as a professional dancer in 1989. "I wasn't born in Erie, but I truly feel like an Erie native at

heart," says Maria. "Erie has shaped my career, my family, and my artistic vision, so in every way that matters, this is home," she adds.



The Lake Erie Ballet Company, along with dancers from Corella Productions, Marguerite's Academy of Dance, NWPA Collegiate Academy, and Sovereign Ballet bring the tradition of the Nutcracker to the Warner Theatre this holiday season.

"Our production of Erie's Nutcracker Reimagined keeps the tradition of the classic ballet, but we bring the story to life in a way that's more engaging... with speaking roles, which no other Nutcracker in the world includes," explains Maria. "The spotlight is truly on Erie – the show is filled with memorable local historical elements and our backdrop highlights recognizable Erie landmarks, making the story feel both timeless and connected to our community," she adds.

If the world has you feeling a little grinchy, an Erie-themed version of the world's most famous Christmas ballet, at our own historic Warner Theatre, may be the perfect way to get into the holiday spirit. "It's a beautiful blend of classic ballet, immersive storytelling, and hometown pride," explains Maria. —Edwina Capozziello

Saturday, Dec. 13 at 7 p.m. and Sunday, Dec. 14 at 2 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$35-\$55 // Tickets and info: [erieevents.com](http://erieevents.com)

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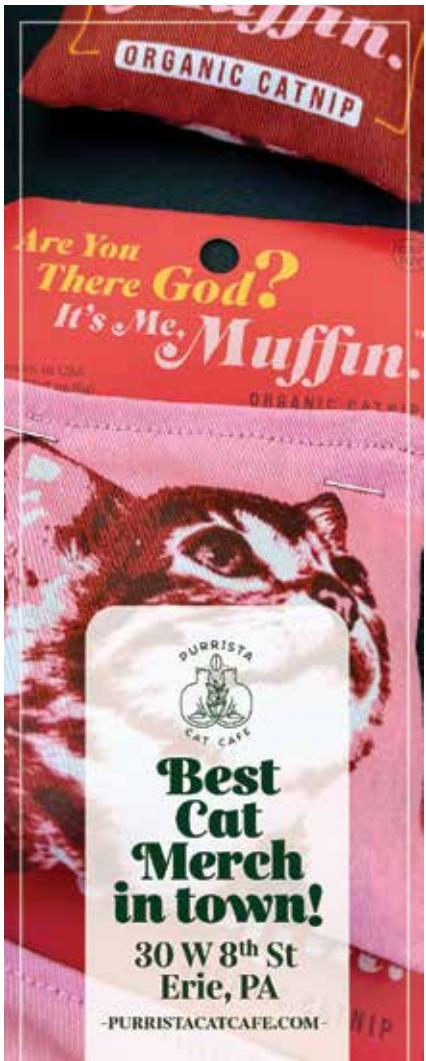
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## EVENTS

### Christmas Memories Celebrates 35 Years at Station Dinner Theatre

Holiday tradition blends laughs with meaning for a really big show

CONTINUING SATURDAY, DEC. 13

A local holiday tradition continues into its 35th year with the Station Dinner Theatre's *Christmas Memories*.

This year, guests are treated to a new retro revisioning of a 1950s variety show. Follow your host Ned



Enjoy dinner and a show, holiday style, at the Station Dinner Theatre this season as they present their 35th year of *Christmas Memories*.

Sullivan as he hosts the Kraft Foods Christmas Hour Special. In the style of mid-century American television, expect special "celebrity" guests to appear. Keep an ear out for the Harmony Singers – a mainstay of each *Christmas Memories* production.

Guests will hear memorable renditions of "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year," "Baby It's Cold Outside," "Do You Hear What I Hear," "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas," and many more. These songs will be intercut with comedy sketches, vintage commercial parodies, and actual "Letters to Santa" from children.

The generational cast includes Seamus Clerkin, Richard Kress, Karen Nasca, Adria Urbanowicz, Paul Urbanowicz, and Rae Jean Urbanowicz – and not only will they be performing, but they will serve as the waitstaff, delivering the audience's

food completely in character.

Dinner is, of course, included with the ticket, and features an appetizer of homemade wedding soup, dinner of stuffed chicken breast, holiday ham, au gratin potatoes, and green beans, with a caramel apple crunch for dessert.

While the sentiment has echoed through the decades, the show has seen dozens of variations. Whether they're stranded touring musicians, old friends reconnecting, or a USO tour performing a throwback performance, the cast is filled with the holiday spirit, always cognizant of the true meaning of Christmas.

– Nick Warren

Saturdays at 5:30 p.m., Sundays at 2:30 p.m. through Dec. 21 // Station Dinner Theatre, 4940 Peach St. // \$31-\$51 // For Tickets and info: [canterburyfeast.com](http://canterburyfeast.com)

### PACA Brings Yuletide Cheer with *Holiday Extravaganza*

Variety show promises a ho, ho, whole lot of fun

FRIDAY, DEC. 19

As the snow of December falls on Erie, the Performing Arts Collective Alliance (PACA) is warming up the stage with their *Holiday Extravaganza*. Taking the Flagship City approach to Carol Burnett and *Saturday Night Live*, PACA's variety show features a mix of sketches, improv, and musical acts from around Erie and the North Pole, celebrating the season and raising funds for renovations.

From sketches with music and poetry performances to dancing, tarot reading, and drag performances, there's a wide range of acts for audiences to watch and participate in. That energy makes it an exciting experience for performers and for audience members. "It brings the audience in. With [music] you're singing to the audience, but with improv you're speaking directly to them," Artistic Director Ryan Dawley explained. "It's going to be a lot of fun. It's something different that we don't do that often, but I would like to do more with it."

Musical performances include the acapella stylings of Flagship City Chorus and Beach Glass Quartet. For the holidays, Director Diane Harder is

reviving The Sisters, a group of nuns who lead the audience in carols in their own comedic style. Stemming from past productions of *Nuncrackers* and *Sister Act*, the group got together month after month to perform as the Sister Act Dinner Club. "These are the sisters of the Divine Instrument. We've got Mother Mary Whack, Sister Mary Shell (E) on keyboard, Sister Mary Angel, Sister Mary Toot on the French Horn, and Sister Mary Carol Hypotenuse on the guitar. There will be 'Jingle Bells,' 'Silent Night' with a French Horn solo, and 'Go Tell It On The Mountain,' with ridiculousness happening throughout."

The show is also the penultimate fundraiser for Rise with PACA which is in support of historic renovations to the building, with Tom Hagen pledging to match up to \$500,000 in donations to the theater. The organization is still shy of that mark, but hopes the community can help raise funding for a new elevator and fifth-floor renovations. "The current elevator is original to the building with the old crank and gate, and we're trying to make it more accessible," Dawley said. "The fifth floor is a beautiful space. I want to put another theater up there with



Diane Harder will present a holiday-themed variety show at PACA entitled *Holiday Extravaganza* with elements of sketch comedy, improv, and musical theater – helping to raise funds for PACA's continued efforts towards building restorations and improvements.

footlights, artist's studios, and places for children's performances. We want to expand the art system for more cultural opportunities. It's just about supporting the arts and the community."

Cali's West will provide catering for the event, and audiences can use PACA's Flex Pass for \$125, which includes admission to eight shows. For Hardner and Dawley, the show's theme is absolute inclusivity. "Come have an amazing time with us, not just watch us have an amazing time. It's not just Christmas, that's why it's the *Holiday Extravaganza*."

– Thomas Taylor

7:30 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$17-\$23 // For tickets and info: [tickets.erierader.com](http://tickets.erierader.com)

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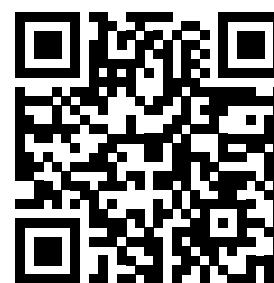
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## Have Your Pick at 2026: New Year's Events in Erie

Celebrate the New Year at one of these beloved Erie locations

### BEGINNING WEDNESDAY, DEC. 31

The clock is counting down towards 2026 and good times are in store. As we move away from 2025, we remember that the new year means new opportunities, new experiences, and many memories to warm you on those cold, winter days that make our dreary Erie home.

Unsure of how you'd like to ring in the new year? We have curated a list of some of Erie's beloved local businesses and the ways they're planning to celebrate. This list is certainly not exhaustive, we encourage you to routinely check our free public online events calendar on our website at [erieviewer.com/calendar](http://erieviewer.com/calendar). – Cassandra Gripp

### WEDNESDAY, DEC. 31 EVENTS

#### Noon Year's Eve at the Blasco Memorial Library

160 E. Front St. // 11 a.m. to noon  
Don't want to mess up your child's sleep schedule? Children and families are welcome to ring in the new

year with a free, festive balloon drop at noon, delicious snacks, and lots of games in the Children's Storytime Room.

#### Noon Year's Eve at The ExpERIence Children's Museum

420 French St. // 10 a.m. to noon and 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Balloons, bubbles, music, and more! Guests are in for a "whirlwind of fun," including an 800-count balloon drop, face painting, confetti slime, Fireworks in a Jar, SINGO competitions, snacks, and a juice box toast. Balloon drops occur at both noon and 4 p.m. Tickets are \$15 per person, with an additional 20 percent off for those with a museum membership.

#### Meet Me at Midnight // Splash Lagoon Indoor Waterpark Resort

8091 Peach St. // 11 a.m. to midnight

Carrying on their tradition of over 15 years, Splash Lagoon welcomes the family for a full day of fun, special activities, event-exclusive merchandise, and plenty of opportunities to "make a splash" before 2026 arrives. Guests

can expect crafts, contests, karaoke, and more with the purchase of their day pass, and even more unique goodies with a "Swift 87" Overnight Getaway package. Prices may vary depending on the package purchased.

#### NYE Party & Prime Rib Buffet // Peek'n Peak Resort

1405 Old Clymer Rd., Clymer, NY // 6 p.m. and 9 p.m.

Give in to the magic of Mardi Gras with this year's Midnight Masquerade. With the purchase of an event ticket, guests will be treated to a delicious prime rib buffet, private bar access, midnight munchies and dessert stations, live entertainment by DJ Josh with Sound Investment, and a champagne toast at midnight.

Not interested in the party but still hungry? The buffet will be open at \$82 per person. Prices may vary for children.

#### New Year's Rockin' Eve with Erie Otters at the Erie Insurance Arena

809 French St. // 6 p.m.

Hockey fans of all ages are encouraged to come and cheer on the Erie Otters as they take to the ice against the Brantford Bulldogs. Tickets start as low as \$24.

#### New Year's Eve Party // Kellar's, A Modern Magic and Comedy Club

1402 State St. // 7 p.m.

Laugh off those seasonal blues with an "unforgettable" evening of music, magic, and more! Over complimentary appetizers and a champagne toast, the night will feature Hidden Treasures: an Earth, Wind, and Fire tribute band, magician James Warren, and a stand-up comedy routine by Lisa Ann "The Glam Ham." Tickets are \$50. The event is limited to adults 21+ with valid ID.

#### New Year's with Come Back to Earth // King's Rook Club

1921 Peach St. // 8 p.m.

Join the King's Rook Club as they welcome a captivating performance by Come Back to Earth, the world's first Mac Miller tribute band. Joining the band, party-goers can also enjoy the musical stylings of well-known jam band Eric Brewer and Friends, The Regulators, and DJ Nitro. Tickets starting at \$17.

#### New Year's Eve with The Geek Army // Presque Isle Downs & Casino

8199 Perry Hwy. // 10 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Hit the jackpot and "rock in the New Year" with the musical stylings of multi-award winning cover band The Geek Army. The event is free of charge. Guests must be 21+ with a valid ID.

#### New Year's Eve Party // BIGBAR

14 E. 10 St. // Bar opens at 11 a.m., celebration in evening

Good food, good drinks, and good times await at BIGBAR.

#### New Year's Eve Celebration // Oliver's Rooftop and Beer Garden

130 E. Front St. // Opens at 11 a.m., celebration in evening

Oliver's will be staying open late to celebrate the New Year. Be sure to check their website throughout the month for a dining experience worthy of celebration.

#### New Year's Eve on the Bay // Two45 Waterfront Grille

55 W. Bay Rd. // 5 p.m.

Located within the Sheraton Erie Bayfront Hotel, Two45 is offering a delicious four-course meal for two, a bottle of champagne, and a late checkout to those who purchase an overnight package.

### THURSDAY, JAN. 1, NEW YEAR'S DAY EVENTS

#### First Day Hike // Asbury Woods

4105 Asbury Rd. // 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Enjoy a free, refreshing, 1 to 2-mile guided hike around the Asbury trails. Guests are asked to dress accordingly. Snowshoes may be necessary depending on the weather. Registration closes two hours before the hike.

#### Erie Runners Club New Year's Day 5 Miler and 5K // Rotary Pavilion, Presque Isle State Park

301 Peninsula Dr. // 10 a.m.

Start your New Year's goals off on the right sneaker with a jaunt on Presque Isle with the Erie Runners Club. Either a 5K or a more challenging 5-mile run ends with post-race refreshments. Registration and a \$23 fee is required.

JESSICA HUNTER



Contributor Cassandra Gripp lines up a (mostly) comprehensive list of events and activities to attend, ringing in the New Year in whatever way works best for your lifestyle. Kids events, parties, dinners, champagne toasts, or First Day hikes – we've got them all!



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## EVENTS

### Centennial Hall's Winter Country Fest

Cold, cold heart

SATURDAY, JAN. 10

Saddle up and break out your denim and cowboy hats because Centennial Hall is getting a little bit country with a cavalcade of local country-inspired artists taking the stage for the Winter Country Fest. The event is being hosted by Erie's latest country sensation Ray & the County Kind, featuring Ryan Ray (on lead vocals, fiddle, mandolin, guitar, and harmonica) and Tanner Edwards (on upright bass, electric bass, and vocals) from Paper Street, along with drummer extraordinaire Steve Barone and guitar virtuoso Jonathan Nolan.

"Ryan called me up to see if I knew anyone who could play lead in an outlaw country band playing original material. I asked him to send me some of his songs. I liked the songs right off the bat and offered myself as a guitarist," Nolan recalls. After forming, they began to play around the region and were able to record a five-song EP called *Courtesy of a Dirt Road Vol. 1* at GCR Audio in Buffalo. They split their stage time doing a mix of covers and originals, with some songs reworked into country-ified versions, giving a new sound to some familiar tunes. Nolan stated, "We hear people say they aren't into country music, but they are into us. I compare it to people who like Johnny Cash and Willie,

but never go beyond that. We could be a gateway band for some people."

Joining the hoedown is Edinboro's own Mayflower Hill, known for their ability to cover a wide array of popular country songs, along with some

"We hear people say they aren't into country music, but they are into us ... We could be a gateway band for some people."

— Jonathan Nolan of Ray & the County Kind

rock and pop music as well. Opening the evening is local singer-songwriter Matt Texter who will be playing with Little Red Engine, joining guitarist Jim Zaahniser and bassist Tanner Edwards, who is pulling double duty that night. Whether you are into the classics like Hank Williams and Waylon Jennings, or modern outlaw country acts like Sturgill Simpson and Billy Strings, you will find something at Centennial Hall to get your boots scootin'. — Larry Wheaton

Doors at 6 p.m., music starts at 7 p.m. // Centennial Hall, 145 W. 11th St. // \$7 at Door, \$5 Advance // For tickets and info: [tickets.eriereader.com](http://tickets.eriereader.com)



The folks at Centennial Hall are going a little bit country in the New Year for their upcoming Winter Country Fest featuring Ray & the County Kind along with locals Mayflower Hill and Matt Texter with Little Red Engine.

# LESSONS & CAROLS

The Cathedral of St. Paul presents its annual **Lessons and Carols** service, bringing together choir, congregation, and community.

The program includes choral works such as *I Wonder as I Wander* and *Ave Maria* by Franz Biebl, along with carols.

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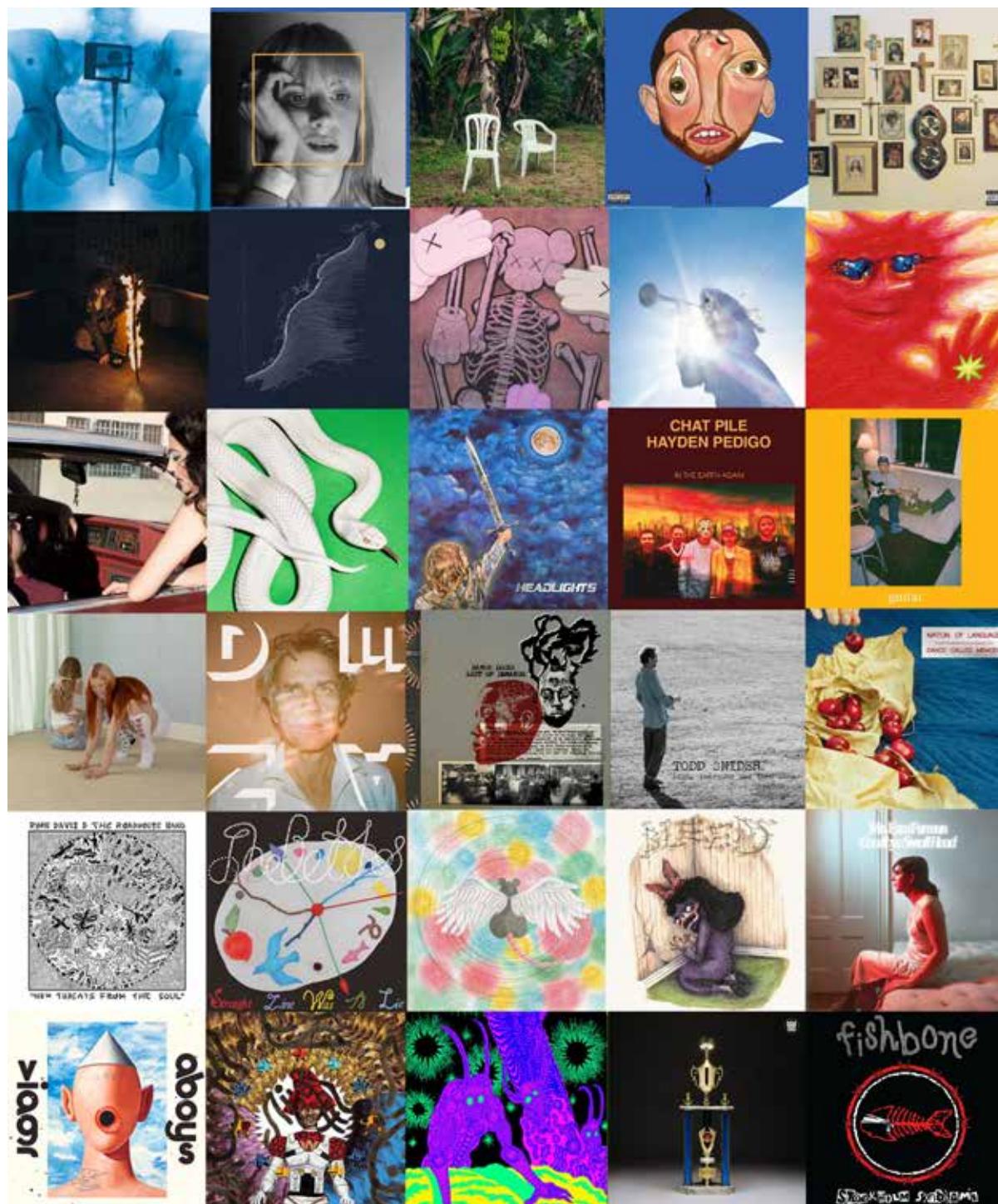


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## Top Five Favorite Albums of 2025

Regular album reviewers share their favorites of the year



For some people, the Erie Reader's album review section is the first page they flip to when a new issue drops. Our group of regular album reviewers represent a diverse range of tastes, genres, styles, and preferences and it's always fun to get their take on the best albums of the year. In 2025, their picks range from indie darlings, singer-songwriters, metal lords, super-hip hip-hop, and everything in between. There's something for everyone on this list and maybe you'll find your new favorite among them. Be sure to check the online version of this article for a custom-made playlist featuring our reviewers' favorite tracks from each of their selected albums. Happy listening, Erie!

### Julia Carden

#### 1. Lorde // *Virgin*

Four years after her fourth release, Lorde dives into introspective themes of gender, relationships, and finding one's place in the world. With glimmering synths, intimate melodies, and zero features, it's unapologetically Lorde – a grown woman in a baby tee."

#### 2. Hayley Williams // *Ego Death at a Bachelorette Party*

This independent project cements Williams' artistry beyond Paramore. Across 18 tracks, she delivers personal stories that feel both nostalgic and modern, resonating with fans who have grown up alongside her. She also jabs at Morgan Wallen with

the line: "I'll be the biggest star in the racist country singers' bar."

#### 3. Bad Bunny // *DeBÍ TiRAR MÁS FOTOS*

Released on Jan. 5, on the eve of Día de los Reyes, this is a no-skip album packed with historical nods and irresistibly catchy beats. Bad Bunny continues to showcase his ability to blend culture, history, and rhythm in a way that feels universal.

#### 4. Mac Miller // *Balloonerism*

This album is a beautiful piece of musical storytelling. The second half leans into Miller's earlier, reflective style, a contrast to the more polished sound of his late career. It's reminiscent of *Watching Movies With The Sound Off*, blending smooth, jazzy beats with layered, textured production. It's especially raw, with lyrics confronting loss and addiction, highlighted by the standout line: "If I die young, promise you'll smile at my funeral." This album stands as a true gift to fans; a posthumous release handled with care and intention.

#### 5. \$uicideboy\$ // *THY KINGDOM COME*

One of \$uicideboy\$'s strongest releases yet (impressive given their 400+ song discography). The boys embrace newfound themes of sobriety, religion, and transformation. Lines like "Rusted hope can be cleaned and made into gold" resonate, and stand out in the darkness of the horrorcore genre.

### Nathaniel Clark

#### 1. Jane Remover // *Revengeseekerz*

After multiple failed attempts to get their third solo album off the ground, Jane Remover decided their best course of action would be to combine the scraps into one project. The result is *Revengeseekerz*: a dizzying array of pedal-laden guitars, reverberated drum machines, and an arcade's worth of video game samples that form one of the most singularly impressive projects of the decade.

#### 2. Quadeca // *Vanisher, Horizon Scraper*

Following up his afterlife-inspired sophomore effort, musical polymath Quadeca crafts his own odyssey on *Vanisher, Horizon Scraper*. The exciting mixture of orchestral flourishes and sparse instrumentation shines like the sun over the waves ahead as the world opens up to you.

#### 3. Clipse // *Let God Sort Em Out*

After a 16-year hiatus, sibling duo Clipse return to the rap game with *Let God Sort Em Out*. With frequent collaborator Pharrell Williams on production, the rappers craft not just the most biting hip-hop project of the year, but also the best comeback record of the 2020s thus far.

#### 4. Geese // *Getting Killed*

Geese are the undeniable success story in rock



ERIE OTTERS

# HOME SCHEDULE

MONTH OF DECEMBER



DECEMBER 11

7PM



DECEMBER 13

TRIBUTE TO JIM WATERS

7PM



DECEMBER 19

7PM



DECEMBER 20

WINTER WONDERLAND

7PM



DECEMBER 31

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## MUSIC

music in 2025. Further refining their craft on *Getting Killed*, the Brooklynites sound in peak form for their christening as modern rock royalty. Now bow down accordingly.

### 5. Black Country, New Road // *Forever Howlong*

After a substantial lineup change in 2022, the Cambridge art rock collective returned to the studio with *Forever Howlong*. Sounding as baroque as ever, the band reintroduces itself with vigor and promise for more narrative excellence to come.

### Aaron Mook

#### 1. Deafheaven // *Lonely People With Power*

Modern blackgaze titans Deafheaven bounce back from 2021's divisive *Infinite Granite* with their most accomplished and kaleidoscopic effort yet – thrashy, melodic, and as genre-defying as ever.

#### 2. Deftones // *Private Music*

Y2K is back, and thanks to a new generation of '90s-loving listeners, so are Deftones. Their first album in five years, *Private Music* also proves their most essential in over a decade, breathing new life into the nu-metal pioneers' beloved catalog.

#### 3. Alex G // *Headlights*

As the once-DIY savant evolves into an indie superstar, Alex G continues to mesh folk, shoegaze, hyperpop, and more, all while reflecting on life as a new father.

#### 4. Chat Pile and Hayden Pedigo // *In the Earth Again*

Semi-experimental Oklahoma sludge-metal mavericks Chat Pile continue to expand their ominous sound, this time into a beautiful, Americana-adjacent hybrid featuring avant-garde guitarist Hayden Pedigo.

#### 5. Mac DeMarco // *Guitar*

Mac DeMarco's first traditional, non-instrumental LP since 2019's *Here Comes the Cowboy* strips nearly all of the bells and whistles to reveal a subdued and shockingly introspective collection from the veteran singer-songwriter.

### Melissa Sullivan Shimek

#### 1. Wet Leg // *Moisturizer*

It's a Friday in 1984. I'm at a slumber party with Dale Bozzio and Su Tissue. They tell me boys are intimidated by me while plucking my eyebrows.

#### 2. Dean Wareham // *That's the Price of Loving Me*

Feels and sounds as gentle and warm as walking into Mr. Rogers' familiar living room from the front porch to hear the fish tank bubbling softly in the corner.

### 3. Damon Locks // *List of Demands*

The spirit of Gil Scott Heron flowing and weaving through CoFlow beats and Psychic TV samples. You'll never lose yourself enough to miss the message.

### 4. Todd Snider // *High, Lonesome, and Then Some*

Your cool older brother made some really bad choices along the way but his easy insight was always deep and wise. RIP Todd.

### 5. Nation of Language // *Dance Called Memory*

If there are wrinkles in time and the multiverse is a potential – this is the album OMD, Human League, and Depeche Mode would have released if they hadn't ended up so mainstream.

### Nick Warren

#### 1. Ryan Davis and the Roadhouse Band // *New Threats From The Soul*

This slack-jawed, overly literate record is simply the greatest synthesis of star-gazing alt-country and navel-gazing indie rock there has ever been. An anthemic testament for Rust Belt weirdos.

#### 2. The Bells // *Straight Line Was a Lie*

There's a rare shortage of artful sweetness in the world, and this album is bursting with it. For this heartwarming Kiwi quartet, I gleefully celebrate their entire catalogue, with this as the pinnacle.

#### 3. Mei Semones // *Animaru*

A singular and undeniable talent, Semones makes intricate jazz guitar runs seem almost effortless. Blending a throwback bossa nova bop with dream pop sensibilities, she switches between Japanese and English for an unforgettable sound.

#### 4. Wednesday // *Bleeds*

Sometimes, the vibes are just right. This idiosyncratic melange from bandleader Karly Hartzman is luxury-built for angst-filled notebooks, channeling '90s alt in a way that makes sense in our awful modern world.

#### 5. Ezra Furman // *Goodbye Small Head*

One of the best songwriters of her generation, Liz Furman harnesses the same spirited vitality she's always had, reframed in a retro toy box of warbly melodies that will stay in your head for weeks.

### Larry Wheaton

#### 1. Viagra Boys // *Viagr Aboys*

There's nothing soft about the Viagra Boys. On their "sort of" self-titled album, they go hard with a touch of punk and a sprinkle of indie rock, all wrapped up in wry lyrics that you will find yourself singing for the next week.

#### 2. WITCH // *Soglo*

The pioneering 1970s Zambian psych-rock band

are back with an album full of frenzied dance songs. With traditional Zambian rhythms, psychedelic guitar sounds, and catchy hooks, it's hard not to get your body moving while listening to it.

### 3. Osees // *Abomination Revealed At Last*

The Osees have released at least one album every year since 2003 – they continue to bring their unique brand of psych-punk for which their energetic live shows are known. This album should be listened to at full volume so your neighbors can also enjoy it.

### 4. El Michels Affair // *24 Hr Sports*

The latest solo release from producer Leon Michels continues the soul jazz groove that's gotten him work with the likes of Norah Jones and the Wu Tang Clan. This funky yet laid-back masterpiece is equally as perfect for a night in with your loved one as it is as a soundtrack to a rauous evening with friends.

### 5. Fishbone // *Stockholm Syndrome*

Ska, punk, funk, soul, and metal are all genres that Fishbone have been known to weave between. On their first full-length album in 17 years, they don't miss a beat. Sounds as wonderful and weird as ever, all while holding a mirror to modern America.

## Top Three Local Albums of 2025

The latest hits from Erie's original musicians

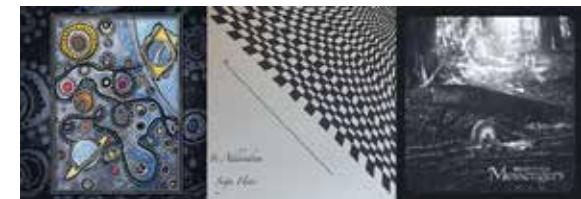
Erie is never short on talent, and within our local music scene that talent ranges wildly. From teenaged rockers, to hip-hoppers, to punks, metal-heads, and everything in between – here are a few can't-miss albums from right here in the Gem City. Hot tip: if you give a local album a listen, an angel gets its wings.

### Saturn to Brazil // *Cosmic Tumblers*

Passionate and beautiful, the debut record from Erie's Saturn to Brazil is a breath of fresh air. The jazz combo offers up a lush selection of original songs. These tracks are rife with funky, syncopated head melodies and exploratory improvisation, artfully oscillating from frenetic madness to finely-tempered grooves. Each member of the talented ensemble (Stephen Trohoske, Mike Russo, Ken "Stix" Thompson, Joel Hunt, and Dave Tamulonis) is showcased in their own expressive ways, with guest musicians entering the fold seamlessly and with purpose. Dually experimental and danceable, these jaunty, Latin-influenced cuts will stick with listeners long after the needle rises. – Nick Warren

### In Addendum // *Sign Here*

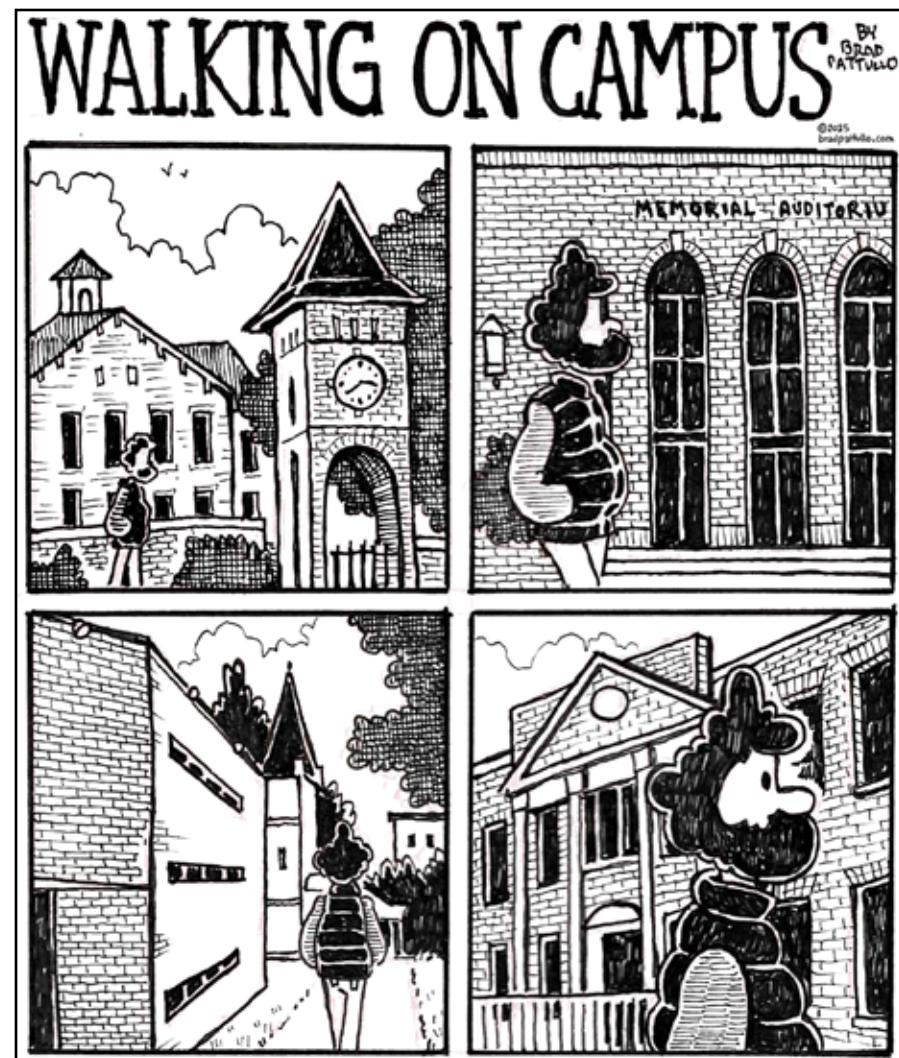
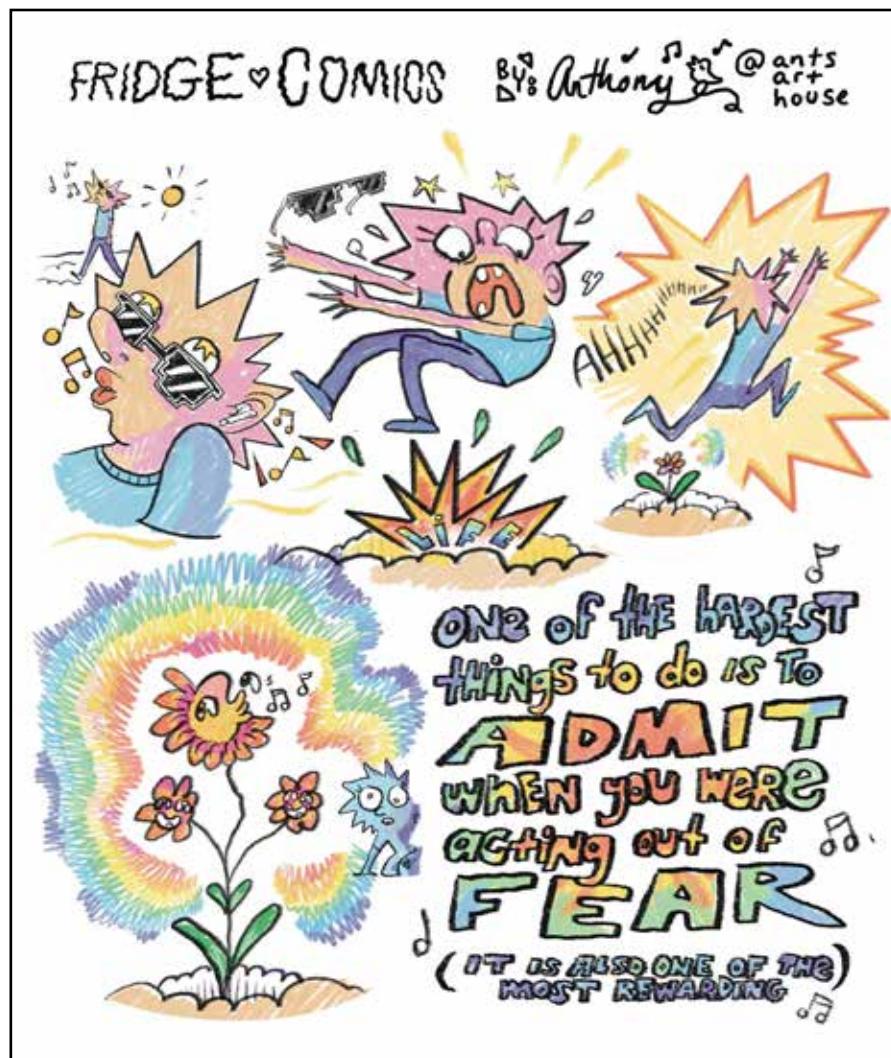
Erie's latest and youngest band recently released their debut full-length album. If you are looking



to be inspired to write your own music, look no further, as the group (consisting of Louis Rullo Johnston, Elliot Levy, Quinn Gould, and Lyric Bankes) has a fresh energy, mixed with a deep knowledge of their instruments. Along with their rigorous practice schedule, In Addendum played a lot of shows around town this year – be sure to catch them in 2026 to see where they are taking their vision. – Larry Wheaton

### Brian the Fly // *Messengers*

I can't write about Brian the Fly, stage name of Mill Village singer-songwriter and producer Brian Kinney, without disclosing that I also record with him under the name Crooner. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't trust me when I call *Messengers* one of the best local albums of the year. It's a kaleidoscopic but cohesive collection of indie-rock about insecurity, familial secrets, and queer romance, invoking the songwriting of artists like Radiohead and Neil Young. – Aaron Mook



## Year In Review: The Erie Reader Book Club

A year of books, coffee, and great company

By: Ally Kutz

2025 was the first full calendar year of the Erie Reader Book Club (after its April 2024 inception), so it only felt right to recap our year of reads at the end of a year that helped define and solidify us as a book club.

But first, a bit about us: on the last Sunday of the month, we gather at Werner Books & Coffee to discuss the monthly read. Each month, the chosen book is based on the theme of that month's Erie Reader issue. This format has allowed us to branch out and read a wide array of books, all of which have led to great discussions.

The club has seen its share of members who have come and gone as we've progressed through the year, but you can always count on seeing some familiar faces, such as the Vickies, Steve, Erin, and myself, amongst many others. You'll often find Werner Books owners Kyle and Lauren joining in on the club's meetings, adding to the already intriguing discussions. We're always glad to add new members and perspectives to the group – we hope you'll join us!

### January 2025: *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward // Best of Erie

Our Best of Erie issue inspires us to select from books that have been lauded for being the best in various ways, so the selection of *Salvage the Bones* was an easy choice after it won the National Book Award in 2011. Best described as "muscly and pulpy," by book club member AJ, the book takes place in an impoverished community in the Deep South during the disastrous Hurricane Katrina. The overall consensus was that the book was extremely well-written, even though some parts were unsettling. It was obvious to all why it had won such a prestigious award.

### February 2025: *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi // Black History Month

For our Black History Month pick, *Homegoing* was one that was well-liked and inspired a lot of discussion. Taking place across multiple timelines and following a family's lineage from the Black experience in Africa and the U.S., the imagery and generational themes throughout were deeply explored by the group. Member Victoria even brought her own personal experiences to the discussion with her familial ties to Africa.

### March 2025: *Kitchen Confidential* by Anthony Bourdain // The Food Issue

Bourdain's peek through the other side of the kitchen door had the group divided. The writing style is brash and sarcastic, which is one of the reasons those familiar with Bourdain loved it while those unfamiliar didn't enjoy it

as much. The discussion led to personal kitchen experiences, both in the home and in restaurant-style settings, with many bringing to the table their own stories from throughout the years.

### April 2025: *North Woods* by Daniel Mason // Earth Day

An absolute favorite of Managing Editor Erin Phillips, *North Woods* was selected for the Earth Day issue because of its overarching themes of the effect of various natural occurrences – climate change, invasive species, human interaction, and wildfires – on one piece of land throughout the course of American history. Many in the club expressed difficulty getting into the book (it begins in dialect, but quickly moves on), but then weren't able to put it down. The storytelling style was unique, with interesting characters and a message that many were moved by when reading.

### May 2025: *Summer* by Ali Smith // Summer Preview

Ali Smith's *Summer* missed the mark for some. With the meeting falling on Memorial Day weekend, our attendance was smaller than usual but a good discussion about the book was still had. Some struggled with the formatting of the book, while others didn't connect with the storyline itself. The difference in opinions allowed for healthy discourse about the different themes and storytelling style.

### June 2025: *Calypso* by David Sedaris // Pride Month

David Sedaris felt like a perfect choice for this month. For the most part, ev-



eryone seemed to enjoy his writing. Those unfamiliar with Sedaris found it difficult to connect with the humor, especially as it related to Sedaris' father. For those who were familiar with Sedaris' other books or his work on NPR, it was a great read that inspired a thoughtful discussion about the ethics of writing about family members and the exaggerations some authors take in their writing.

### July 2025: *Tom Lake* by Ann Patchett // 40 Under 40

When selecting a book for our 40 Under 40 issue, we go with coming-of-age stories. *Tom Lake* was an excellent pick for this theme, as it really is multiple coming-of-age stories happening at once. A family comes together during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the mother sharing her story while her daughters are each experiencing their own transformative times. Many loved it, noting they enjoyed the writing style as well as the story-within-a-story aspect. The

group made connections between *Tom Lake* and the play *Our Town* during the discussion.

### August 2025: *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker* by A'Lelia Bundles // Erie Gives Day

Our smallest gathering this year centered around a famous philanthropist, and with help from the folks at the Erie Community Foundation, we landed on Madam C.J. Walker. Although we all agreed that Walker led an incredible and inspiring life, we also agreed that the book was dense, drawn out, and unnecessarily detailed.

### September 2025: *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullors // Back to School

Finding books on education itself that aren't textbooks can be difficult – this year, we decided on a book in which one of the main protagonists is a child, and whose author was quite young at the time of its publishing. The club had a lengthy and deep dis-

cussion about how each of the characters factored into each other's lives. With the book's main character being deaf, Vickie W. also shared that her uncle was also deaf, leading to discussion around her own personal experiences and giving more insight into the character.

#### October 2025: *Weyward* by Emilia Hart // Halloween

The Halloween issue is always one to look forward to, as is the book selection. Unfortunately, the choice of Emilia Hart's *Weyward* didn't pack as big of a punch as was hoped. Consensus around the book was lukewarm at best, with most finding the writing mediocre. Discussion centered on the story of three women from the same family and their connection to the natural world, allowing them to overcome situations of extreme abuse. Many felt it was predictable and were overall indifferent to it.

#### November 2025: *Home for the Bewildered* by Michelle Tobin // Shop Local

Choosing a local author can be a bit daunting – there are many great options to choose from, and making sure we pick something that will appeal to a wide audience is crucial. In *Home for the Bewildered*, the story follows a therapist in the 1970s and her patients, introducing us to people from all walks of life and holding a mirror onto the therapist's psyche. We had a great surprise when the author attended the meeting, creating a unique experience that allowed us to not only discuss the book, but to ask questions and talk in-depth with her about her writing and inspirations.

#### December 2025: *The Snow Child* by Eowyn Ivey // Year in Review Issue

With this, our Year in Review issue, a lot of different themes can be explored. From wintry scenes to stories of the past, *The Snow Child* embodies a bit of each. Derived from the Russian folk tale, the story is set in 1920s Alaska and follows a childless older homesteading couple struggling in the Alaskan wilderness, when the sudden emergence of a young girl from the woods changes their lives.

*We will meet on Sunday, Jan. 4 at 1 p.m. to discuss the novel, so stop by for a chat about the book to see where the conversation leads!*

## Top Five Films of 2025

Cinema offers a haven in a terrible year

By: Forest Taylor

The phrase "may you live in interesting times" rang disconcertingly true in 2025, with every week seemingly presenting us with some new, unprecedented tragedy or scandal. For me, the cinema has been my refuge from this terrible year – a consistent source of entertainment and enlightenment.

While it seems that streaming is often the preferred method for watching today, there are more avenues than ever to catch great films, and I was able to see incredible movies at local art collectives, university film clubs, independently owned theaters, as well as the multiplex. I was even lucky enough to attend the Toronto International Film Festival this year, something I hope to make a regular tradition. Though it doesn't always feel like it, terrific works of cinema are being produced in every corner of the globe. So here are my top five films released in 2025:

### 1. *Sentimental Value*

Joachim Trier's quiet family drama proved to be the best film of 2025 and the director's best film yet. The story of sisters Nora and Agnes (Renate Reinsve and Inga Ibsdotter Lilleaas) who must reexamine their complex relationship with their famous film director father (Stellan Skarsgård) after he casts a young American actress (Elle Fanning) for a role he originally wrote for Nora is a powerful meditation on shared family trauma, the myriad ways people deal with grief, and how art can be used to preserve the past.

Trier addresses these themes with some ingenious editing and mise en scène, and it is all carried by four incredible performances, especially Reinsve and Skarsgård. Trier brilliantly displays how history, personal tragedy, art, people, places, and objects all coalesce to tell a person's story. And when that person is gone, these fragments of a life will endure.

### 2. *It Was Just an Accident*

For the last 15 years, Jafar Panahi has been making films he technically wasn't legally allowed to make. At the risk of imprisonment for supposed "crimes against the Islamic State," Panahi has used increasingly clever and creative ways to circumvent the restrictions placed on him, and it all culminates with this – easily his angriest film. The story of a group of people who, by chance, come across a man who may have been the government official who tortured them in prison is a passionate cry against the injustices of a theocratic regime. That said, it also manages to be, at times, darkly funny, and full of the empathy and humanism so prevalent in Panahi's

works. That is, until we reach the ending, one of the most nerve-wracking in recent memory. Panahi's career has shown us that no amount of authoritarianism can ever silence great art.

### 3. *Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk*

After the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks, French-Iranian filmmaker Sepideh Farsi planned to travel to Gaza to report on the situation firsthand. Although denied entry, she met a young Palestinian woman named Fatima Hassouna, who offered to



(Clockwise from top left) *Sentimental Value* // *It Was Just an Accident* // *Hamnet* // *Twinless* // *Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk*

give daily updates of her life to Farsi via WhatsApp as things in Gaza became increasingly dire. The result is an incredible documentary detailing life in a war zone and a chronicle of one woman persevering through a devastating situation with the help of religious faith, dreams of a better future, and the most radiant smile. It becomes so easy to ignore deaths when they are presented as numbers on a news ticker. Farsi and Hassouna become chroniclers of a terrible humanitarian crisis, accentuating the true human cost of war all the way to one of the most important films of the year's heartbreakingly denouement.

### 4. *Hamnet*

Chloe Zhao's follow-up after getting that Marvel money is a gorgeously shot, heart-rending adaptation of Maggie O'Farrell's novel and her best film yet. The plot centers on the love and lives of William Shakespeare (Paul Mescal) and his wife Agnes (Jessie Buckley) before and after the tragic death of their only son, inspiring



the creation of Shakespeare's great FILMtionally devastating meditation on how we process loss and how art is used to express the complexity of life (an interesting companion piece to *Sentimental Value*). Full of beautiful, sumptuous cinematography reminiscent of a Terrence Malick film and anchored by two of the most talented young actors working today (especially Jessie Buckley in the performance of a lifetime), Zhao's film is a tale of love and loss, grief and redemption that would make The Bard proud. The very reason we go to the movies.

### 5. *Twinkless*

James Sweeney's tale of love, friendship, and betrayal was something I decided to watch on a whim. To my surprise, it turned out to be one of the best films of the year. The story of two men (Dylan O'Brien and director Sweeney) who meet at a twin bereavement support group and then form a seemingly unbreakable bond takes us through the different ways people deal with loss and heartbreak, and examines the thin line between intimacy and codependency. Telling

his tale out of order, Sweeney sets up the close bond first, so when the other shoe drops, and a character's true motivations are revealed, it proves just as shocking for the audience.

While it seems that streaming is often the preferred method for watching today, there are more avenues than ever to catch great films ... Though it doesn't always feel like it, terrific works of cinema are being produced in every corner of the globe.

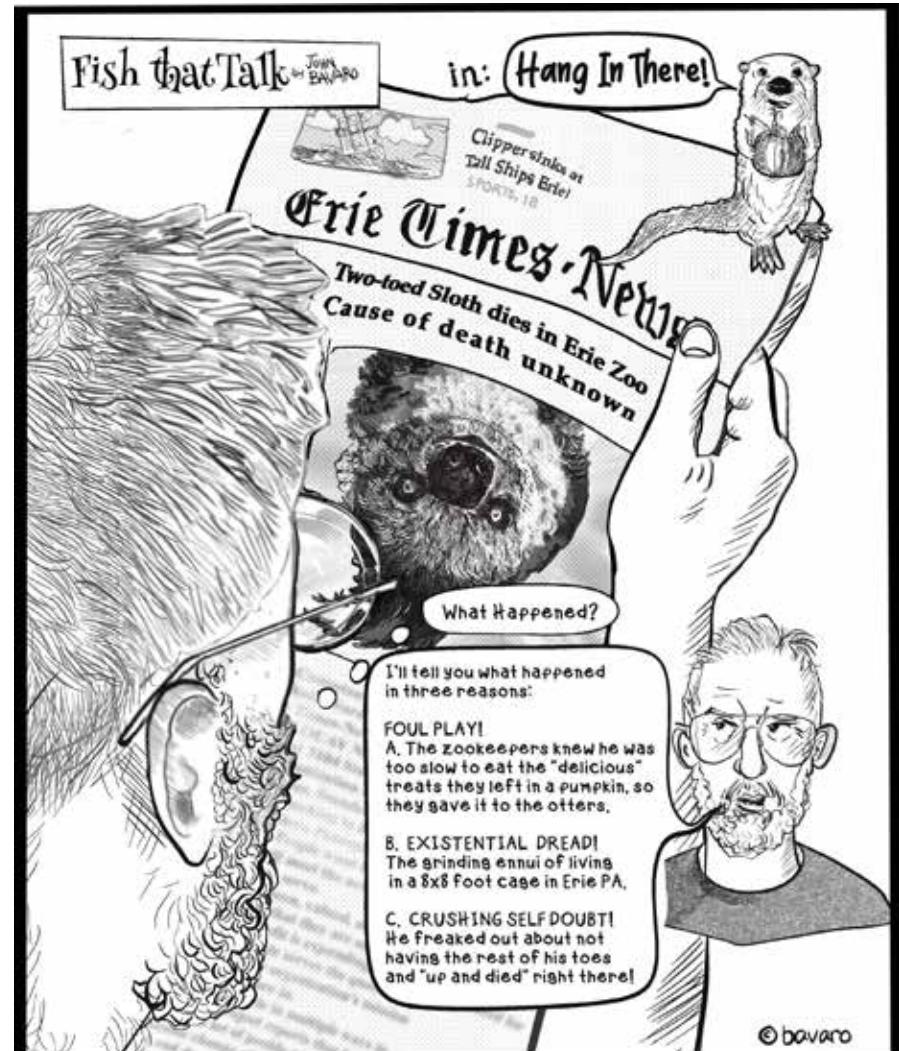
That said, Sweeney never condemns his characters, even at their most despicable. The result is a film that is funny, awkward, tragic, infuriating, and oddly sweet. In other words, achingly, wonderfully human.

### Honorable Mentions

*Sorry, Baby*  
*Ephesus*  
*One Battle After Another*  
*Suspended Time*  
*Eddington*

## NEGATIVE WORLDS

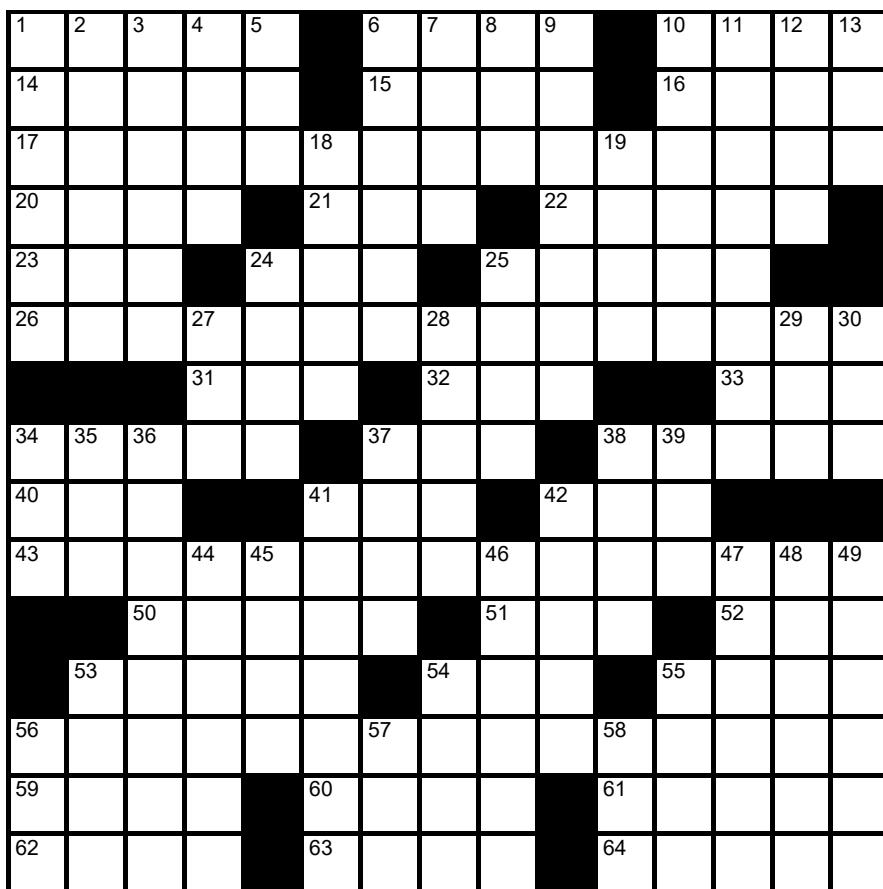
"MARK THE HALLS WITH BONKERS PLOTLINES" BY NICK WARREN



## JUST TOYIN' WITCHA — BY B. TOY



## CROSSWORD



### Across

1. Mag with quizzes  
 6. Honey structure  
 10. Obsolete tape players  
 14. Cymbals with a foot pedal  
 15. Largest oceanic dolphin  
 16. "Hi" on the high seas  
 17. Certain Scottish girl's lessons with designer Bill?  
 20. Worm work?  
 21. Feeling awful  
 22. Hits the mall  
 23. Long shocker  
 24. Gilbert & Sullivan's "Princess \_\_\_"  
 25. Equalize  
 26. Removes moisture from a Great Lake's fast-food side?  
 31. "Hamilton" creator \_\_\_-Manuel Miranda  
 32. Mook in the "Mutts" comic, e.g.  
 33. Org. that looks over Heat and Thunder  
 34. Cereal holders  
 37. Ruin  
 38. Eleanor in a Beatles song  
 40. Actress de Armas  
 41. Gained  
 42. Granola bit  
 43. Reached the temperature of some Greek vowels?

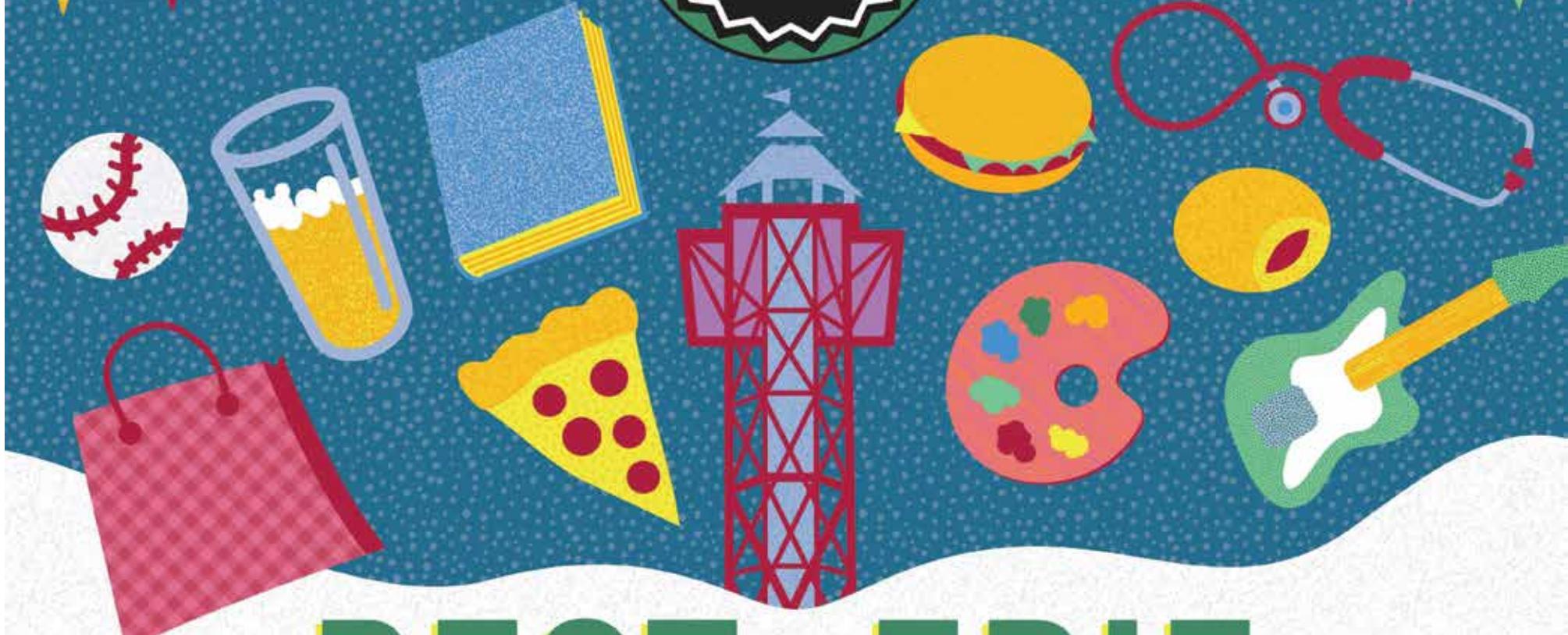
50. The most recent Bond  
 51. "\_\_\_ be a pleasure!"  
 52. Former "All Things Considered" co-host Shapiro  
 53. Catches, as fly balls  
 54. Raw material  
 55. Bowie rock genre  
 56. Nebulous area between a "Simpsons" bully and the late MMA fighter Slice?  
 59. Stressed type (abbr.)  
 60. Jacob's twin brother, in the Bible  
 61. Boston NHler  
 62. It may be dominant  
 63. "Atlas Shrugged" author  
 64. Carbonated beverages  
**Down**  
 1. Went after  
 2. More obsequious  
 3. "Okay to proceed?"  
 4. Zorro accessory  
 5. Post-fourth qtr. periods  
 6. Neck piece  
 7. Type of exam  
 8. Hosts  
 9. Rock band member  
 10. "Love! \_\_\_! Compassion!" (Terrence McNally play-turned-film)  
 11. Lip issue  
 12. "Friends" friend  
 13. Part of PBS, for short  
 18. 46th U.S. President  
 19. One who gets to cooking  
 24. Egyptian goddess of fertility  
 25. Shred  
 27. Letter-shaped pipe  
 28. Words of resignation  
 29. Recede  
 30. For example  
 34. Do some grocery work  
 35. Sean \_\_\_ Lennon  
 36. Sentinel  
 37. "Switched-On Bach" synthesizer  
 38. Night visit to the fridge  
 39. Lance of the O.J. Trial  
 41. Feline feeler  
 42. \_\_\_ Bi-Flex (immune support supplement brand)  
 44. Fine for farming  
 45. Tapioca alternative  
 46. 1997 basketball film that brought on sequels  
 47. Collection of Jewish laws  
 48. "Lawrence of \_\_\_" (1962 epic)  
 49. Carly and Paul, for two  
 53. Locale  
 54. Qatar neighbor  
 55. Copter ancestor  
 56. Dublin dance  
 57. "This \_\_\_ test"  
 58. Scale amts.



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### Answers to last puzzle





# BEST *of* ERIE

## Welcome to the brand new Best of Erie 2025 Final Voting!

We want to hear from you, our Reader readers, about what is the latest and greatest in Erie. Whether it's Best Restaurant, Best Doctor, or even Best Dog Groomer, we want to hear what people, places, and businesses make Erie so unique to YOU.

*We've completely revamped and relaunched our Best of Erie voting for 2025!* We've streamlined and updated the process to make it easier to vote and make your business more visible to the community.

**Best of Erie final voting closes Monday, Dec. 15.** We'll tabulate the results and announce the winners in print and online on **Thursday, Jan. 15.**

Log in to [bestof.eriereader.com](http://bestof.eriereader.com) and vote today!