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### From the Editor

#### The American dream

By: Erin Phillips

It feels like maybe America doesn't deserve a birthday party this year.

We've gone back on our word.

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." We fought a war, the results of which we're supposed to celebrate the day after this issue is published, to separate from an oppressive monarchy and to derive our country's "just powers from the consent of the governed."

But the governed do not consent. The administration's behavior (and the sanctioning of that behavior by the Supreme Court) is cruel, inhumane, and deeply anti-American. We are effectively *suffocating* the tired, poor, huddled masses.

Not much surrounding what's happening right now feels like it calls for a celebration.

Luckily the Erie Reader has some good news that actually *does* feel like a call for celebration. Within these pages are the results of hours of sifting through hundreds of nominations, back-and-forth emails, multiple photoshoots, writing, editing, honing, and ultimately publishing a list now in its 13th year: our **2025 40 Under 40 class** and the breath of fresh air that comes with it.

The 40 listed herein can be seen as a microcosm of the best parts of America – folks who embrace the qualities historically associated with Americans. Hard work, perseverance and grit, and pursuing their happiness by lifting up and supporting *all* of the people in our community.

This list represents a patchwork of real Americans and an example of that which we should all feel inspired by. We have creative entrepreneurs, teachers bolstering the next generation, lawyers fighting for those who have a quieter voice, artists speaking truths through song or paint or words, and those who have dedicated their lives in service to veterans, refugees, and the environment. Every young person featured within these pages should give you a little bit of hope for our community's, and by proxy, America's future.

Our Declaration of Independence does not specify that it guarantees happiness, just the *pursuit* of it, and there will inevitably be those who will be disappointed that their nomination did not result

in a spot on our list this year. I would love to paraphrase something Ash Jones, one of our 2025 honorees, shared – in years past, he would try to get nominations to be featured but this year, instead of hoping for it, he got to work. There is nothing more American than that attitude and we applaud it. And we saw it. And we honored it. You can read more about him and his hard work in the community within.

In much the same way America's patchwork is made up of people coming to our country from all around the world, this year's 40 Under 40 list is made up of a remarkable number of people who chose Erie. People who were born and raised elsewhere – some from nearby like Pittsburgh or Buffalo, others from further afield like Canada or the U.S. Virgin Islands – who became so smitten with our city they decided to lay down roots. These people want to be here because they see the path we're on and they're excited to be a part of our movement forward.

So this Independence Day, rather than looking at our government as a representation of America, look to our people. We found 40 good ones here in our little community fairly easily and there are millions more where they came from.







## **Piracy on the Baseball Seas**

How an Erie ballplayer became the inspiration for the Pittsburgh Pirates team name

By: Jonathan Burdick

e was the "king of second basemen," affectionately known to residents of Erie as "Our Looie," and, as described by the Erie Daily Times in the early 1900s, "the best-known and most popular ball player Erie ever turned out." As fate would have it, he also was the inspiration for the Pittsburgh Alleghenys professional baseball team's switch to a new name: the Pittsburgh Pirates.

His name was Louis W. Bierbauer, born in Erie to German immigrants on Sept. 28, 1865, mere months after the end of the Civil War. At the time, baseball was already the most popular sport in the United States and he learned to play the game on vacant lots around Erie. He threw with his right hand, but batted lefty, and while he was a natural talent, he also had an unrivaled work ethic when it came to playing ball.

In 1884, still only a teenager, he joined the Interstate League's Erie Malleables baseball team as a catcher. "Erie base ball stock is on the rise," the Erie Daily Times reported that year, noting that the team was "well supported" by the young Bierbauer's efforts. The following season, they wrote that the Malleables would "be equal to anything which has ever represented Erie on the diamond field" with the team's "nucleus of a strong nine." Over the following year, Bierbauer played for a handful of teams around the region, including in Ontario, as well as with the Erie Olympics team in a short-lived league that played against Youngstown, Dayton, Springfield, Lexington, and Frankfurt.

In April 1886, at age 20, he made his professional debut with the Philadelphia Athletics of the American Association of Base Ball Clubs (AA). He switched to second base, taking advantage of his speed and lightning quick reflexes. According to one account, he grumbled about the change, but after one game, his talent for the position was clear.

"A Philadelphia crowd never saw second base played as Bierbauer played it," a teammate said afterwards. "Nothing was too hot for him. ... [He] worked as if he had been born in that position." Bierbauer stated that he felt guilty taking someone else's position, but before long, he was being hailed as "the greatest second baseman in the American Association."

He was very self-critical despite his success. The Philadelphia Press reported how he'd be "very much grieved" anytime he made an error and his teammates relayed how he simply wouldn't stop going on and on about his previous game's errors until he had a chance to redeem himself in the next game, always quipping beforehand, "Now I wonder if the Lord is with me or against me today?"

Around this time, he married. They had a son, whom they named after him. Bierbauer was very much a family man and always spent the off-season back in Erie at their home on Liberty Street, keeping

his game sharp by practicing in a local gymnasium. He also still played local games, which generated significant buzz. Before one Oct. 1888 game, the Erie Daily Times argued that "his playing alone will be worth the price of admission."

During the 1889 season though, tragedy struck. In early July, Bierbauer's wife (only referred to as Mrs. Bierbauer in articles, including in her obituary) was struck with a serious illness. She held on for nearly two weeks, but died on July 19. Despite the loss, he played exceptionally well the remainder of the season.

After the season's end, there was turmoil in his professional career too. Ballplayers had organized to rebel against the AA as well as the National League of Professional Baseball Club (NL) in what was described as a "wage war" over stagnant and insignificant pay while franchise owners were raking in record profits. Further, the players alleged, these owners had complete control over players and often blacklisted, even from the minor leagues, any perceived rabble-rousers.

The Erie Daily Times sided with the players. "If we may judge the country at large by the sentiment in Erie, there is an active popular sympathy with the efforts of the players to escape from the bondage of the League managers, and to reap for themselves the profit which is derived from their exhibition of skill in the national game," the editors stated.

Many ballplayers, including Bierbauer, left the two leagues in protest and joined the newly formed Players' National League (PL), sometimes referred to as the Brotherhood League. Attendance profits would be split among investors and the players. Bierbauer signed with the Brooklyn Ward's Wonders. He batted over .300 that season and was regularly complimented in the newspapers for his defense. "There's one of the greatest players that ever stood on a diamond," one spectator said of Bierbauer that season.

The financing unfortunately wasn't working out and the new league ceased operations after a single season. For the 1891 season then, it was decided that players from the PL would automatically revert back to the teams they were on in their previous leagues. As for Bierbauer though, his name had been left off the Philadelphia Athletics' reserve list of previous ballplayers. In what the papers called "The Bierbauer Controversy," this caused a lot of confusion and speculation about his future. Editors of newspapers questioned if the AA and the Athletics might attempt blocking him from joining another team. On Feb. 5, Philadelphia's manager met with Bierbauer, offering a large salary in hopes of getting a contract officially signed. Bierbauer declined. It was reported that he was "determined not to play with the Athletics" and said he would sit in the bleachers first.

When Philadelphia's omission became public, numerous teams attempted to secure Bierbauer. In the



Louis W. Bierbauer, "the best-known and most popular ball player Erie ever turned out," was not only a local baseball phenom, he also helped give the Pittsburgh Pirates their name – as the club scooped him up in a "piratical" way from the Philadelphia Athletics.

Jan. 3, 1891 issue of *Sporting Life*, he was called the "most sought-after ball player in America" whose "ability as a batter, baseman and baserunner, combined with his exemplary habits, make him a valuable acquisition for any team."

In the rival NL, the Pittsburgh Alleghenys desperately wanted him. Most of their players from the PL's Pittsburgh Burghers were returning, but they needed a second baseman. In February, team manager Ned Hanlon personally traveled to Erie by train to track down and attempt to sign Bierbauer.

"I think he's the greatest second baseman living," Hanlon told the Erie Daily Times. "He is a phenomenal man. He seems to have the instinct of knowing just where a ball is going to go, and the moment he hears the ball strike the club, he is off after it. He takes all the chances and gets them too."

As described in Alfred H. Spink's 1910 history on baseball, Hanlon "found [Bierbauer] on Presque Isle Peninsula, his favorite 'hang-out." Bierbauer was an avid hunter and fisherman and would spend days at a time throughout the winter living out of a shack on



Lou Bierbauer, affectionately known to Erie residents as "Our Looie," is pictured here with the 1896 Pittsburgh Pirates baseball team. He is in the top row, third in from the left.

Presque Isle. While possibly embellished, according to multiple accounts, Spink crossed the iced-over bay in the midst of a snowstorm to find Bierbauer. After locating him, Hanlon offered him an "attractive contract and a handsome bonus" of \$4,500 (about \$160,000 adjusted for inflation). Bierbauer signed.

The Athletics organization was "very sore" about this. They filed an official complaint to the interleague arbitration board calling Pittsburgh's acquisition of Bierbauer "piratical." A Philadelphia writer referred to it as "piracy on the baseball seas." The board ultimately sided with Pittsburgh and Bierbauer. The "Pirates" nickname, initially meant as an insult, stuck and was embraced by team management and Pittsburgh fans.

Hanlon asked Bierbauer if he wanted to spend the rest of the offseason down south in Hot Springs, Arkansas to play and prepare for the upcoming season. He initially declined. "I believe in hard work at home," he explained, adding, "The boys get down there and there is lots to see and they don't take care of themselves, and when they come back North, they are soft and can't play ball until the season is half over." He further stated that he never had any problems practicing and conditioning in Erie. He had recently remarried to a woman named Jennie Scowden (with whom he'd have two more children)

and likely didn't want to spend more time away from his family than necessary.

Eventually, Hanlon convinced him to come down for *half* the time, but it didn't do Bierbauer much good. He contracted malaria and was put on bedrest for weeks.

His first season in Pittsburgh was a little rocky (some speculated it was due to lasting grief over his wife's death), batting only .206 while also battling a serious injury. At season's end, it's unclear what transpired, but Bierbauer and management clashed, leading the second baseman to demand his release from the team who he felt was "damaging to his reputation." Eventually, they worked it out and even offered him another \$4,500 for his second season.

During this season, tragedy almost struck again. Jennie became so ill that Bierbauer refused to leave her side, the death of his first wife certainly still fresh in his mind, and he missed games to be with her while she recovered. When Bierbauer returned, he finally started finding his groove with the team. He was fielding ground balls, turning double-plays regularly, and battling "like a fiend" as he knocked in



This historic photo shows Exposition Park in Pittsburgh, where Lou Bierbauer – an Erie native who never liked to play too far away from home – spent six seasons with the Pirates, a team whose name he helped inspire.

RBIs. Over the next few seasons, his statistics continued to improve. In 1895, he struggled at the plate once again, but had been off to a promising start in 1896 when he broke his ankle.

That following March, the Pittsburgh Pirates sold him to the St. Louis Browns. Bierbauer was *not* happy. St. Louis was much further from home, he had a newborn, and the previous summer he had just purchased a restaurant and saloon in Erie. So, he announced his retirement, saying he was "deeply offended" by the decision and would rather be *dead* than play in St. Louis. He'd stay in Erie and run his business instead.

After a year of playing for Erie clubs and doing some umpiring, he then decided to un-retire and join St. Louis in 1898. After a few games though, he returned to Erie. Over the next few years, he bounced around, playing for teams in Buffalo, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, but the remainder of his years would mostly be spent in Erie where he played on, captained, coached, and umpired for numerous city teams well into his forties. Meanwhile, his son, Louis Jr., described as "the pride of his heart" of his father who he matched in "demeanor and in stature," also played with the Erie Sailors and other minor league teams throughout the 1910s.

Bierbauer secured a job with the Jarecki Manufacturing Company as a molder and then as a nightwatchman for Odin Stove Works. In Jan. 1926, at age 60, he very suddenly became sick and was admitted to Hamot Hospital. He died shortly after of complications from pneumonia.

"Erie athletic circles, as a host of friends in virtually every walk of life, today mourn the death of one who once walked among them as a hero," published the Erie Daily Times. Bierbauer was survived by his wife, Jennie, as well as his two sons and daughter. Former teammates served as his pallbearers during his burial at the Erie Cemetery.

Regardless of any clashes with management, Bierbauer always remained an enthusiastic Pittsburgh Pirates fan — and nearly a century after his death, the team name that he inspired lives on.

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



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## **Democrats Trapped Between Trump Fear and Biden Loyalty**

How Democrats' laxity in producing viable alternatives backfired in recent election

By: Jeff Bloodworth

ear gas. ICE raids. Bunker-bombs. Salvadoran prisons. At least 5 million "No Kings" protesters. We Americans, as the ersatz Chinese proverb goes, are "living in interesting times." And Donald Trump's second term is only at the 6-month mark. Jim Wertz spoke for many in telling me, "It is all a little overwhelming." The former chair of the Erie County Democratic Party described the president's actions as "a punctuation mark on our Constitutional crisis." But for now, Wertz admitted, "We just watch in awe and horror."

But what if I were to tell you that the awe and horror were avoidable? The sting of this might burn, but it also lights the path out of Trumpism. In politics, popularity, as you might guess, is important. When a candidate dips far below 50 percent approval, they lose: see Trump, Donald. In his first term, Trump averaged a 41.1 percent approval rating. In November 2020, he lost to Joe Biden by 7 million votes. By July 2023, 63 percent of Americans still disapproved of him. Trump was beatable. The problem for Democrats was Biden's 38 percent approval rating and that only 26 percent of the party faithful wanted him re-nominated.

Inflation at home and disorder abroad concerned voters. But 73 percent of Americans thought Biden was simply too old for a second term. And they were not alone. Lindsey Helfrey, chair of the Crawford County Democratic Party, told me, "I thought he [Biden] would be dead, and we'd have a contested convention." Aides to Vice President Kamala Harris had even game-planned succession scenarios. Such concerns were not fantastical. Jake Tapper and Alex Thompson's *Original Sin* recounts Biden's physical decline.

Thanks to Tapper and Thompson, we now know what the average voter realized in their bones: Father Time is undefeated. Slowed by age, Biden had accrued a solid legislative record. But by 2024, the rigors of the world's most demanding office slammed into him like an actuarial sledge-hammer. Functional between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., the president no longer held regular cabinet or staff meetings. The "Politburo," a team of five to six White House loyalists, ran the presidency. Contradictory facts can be simultaneously true. Trump was beatable. Biden was too old. And yet, as one senior Democrat admitted, "There [wa]s no Plan B [to Biden]."

Conor Lamb, a former Congressman from western Pennsylvania, understands the simple calculus. He told me, "The American people saw it [Biden's age]. The elites couldn't catch up to it." In 2023, White House officials decided: they were "Ridin' with Biden."

After reading Original Sin, Wertz admitted,

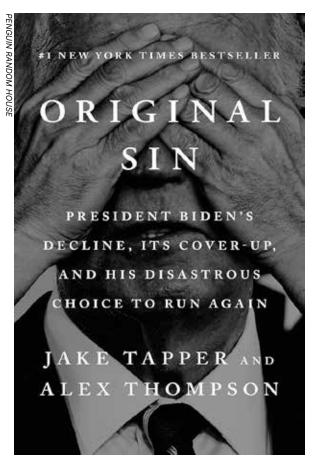
"I was shocked at how quickly and easily they closed ranks, took the wheel, and fell behind him running." Revisiting Biden-world is not an act of political masochism. Rather, assessing how Democratic elites slow-walked into political disaster is to understand what ails American democracy.

Lamb rightfully dismisses the notion of a Biden "cover-up." He told me, "The American public figured out what they thought. It was [political elites] who were not aware." Biden's infirmities were hiding in plain sight. Wertz explained that the distance between the average American's opinion of Biden and those of Democratic elites is "a reflection of a larger problem with...[elites] not knowing the [temperature] of the nation." In this, Wertz is right. Democratic elites constantly called 2024 the most consequential presidential race of the era. But for this race, they tried to run an elderly man who few Americans believed was capable for the job.

Helfrey is no D.C. insider. But as a program specialist for adults with cognitive issues, she possesses unique insight into the Biden fiasco. She told me, "I've been to multiple events where he [Biden] was really good – he even ad-libbed." She explained, for someone of Biden's age "taking dynamic questions is different. Nimbly being able to bounce around questions, it is a hard ballgame." This, according to Helfrey, is when staffers or any "people around [them] will unconsciously fill in the gaps in their abilities." Because of her political and professional experience, Helfrey understood: "Biden hired the best people and let them do their job. The people who didn't see it were the people doing the job of the presidency."

Wertz agreed. He compared it to "boiling the frog." To him, as a staffer, "You are just there and not seeing it the same way, as Jon Favreau [a former Obama speechwriter] who saw him twice in 16 months and was shocked [by the decline]." Lamb concurred in telling me, "I think there were people who loved and believed in him." Lamb, who last saw Biden in August 2021, is like Wertz and Helfrey, an outsider trying to decipher the inner workings of a White House. Biden staffers viewed Trump as an existential threat. They knew Biden was elderly and politically vulnerable. But their love for and proximity to the president caused a group delusion. My trio of western Pennsylvanian politicos aren't wrong about the benign sources of this group delusion. The road to hell, as they say, is paved with good intentions.

"Washington," Senator Gary Hart is said to have once warned, "is always the last to know." As if to prove this maxim, Helfrey, who resides 328 miles from the Capitol, always understood, "America was never going to [re]elect him [Biden]." Meanwhile, only one Democratic congressperson, Dean Phillips, acted on what Helfrey



This month, Jeff Bloodworth takes a look at the topics revealed in Jake Tapper and Alex Thompson's book on Joe Biden, *Original Sin*, and how the recent presidential election could have gone differently for Democrats.

knew to be obvious. In December 2023, Phillips, a soft-spoken Minnesota moderate, launched a primary challenge to Biden. And this is where the bee's sting becomes a venomous bite.

Every poll indicated Trump was beatable and Biden weak. But no Democrat, except Phillips, budged. Sensing doom, Gregg Hurwitz rushed to help. In 2018, the best-selling novelist and Hollywood scriptwriter had turned his "deep interest in storytelling and narrative" toward politics. In that midterm, his content and messaging strategies for various candidates helped flip 20 "purple" House seats blue, including Phillips' suburban Minneapolis district. Five years later, Hurwitz assisted Phillips during his presidential run. What he experienced still shocks him. He told me, "Everyone agreed privately with Dean [about Biden]." But when it came to endorsements or working for the campaign, "not one single person - was willing to face getting blackballed and having their careers destroyed by the Dems. It was awful."

In other words, Democrats in Congress knew Biden had few paths to victory. They all feared Trump 2.0. Unlike White House staffers, they were close enough to see Biden's decline but far enough to have some critical distance. Yet, they stayed mum. But as if that was not enough, they also threatened to ruin the careers of anyone who would endorse or work for Phillips. Nearly two years later, he said of the pretense about Biden's fitness to run, "It was as reckless as any lie for power has been in my lifetime. As terrible as Trump's need to have won an election he lost."

Eva Posner sees it much the same way as Hurwitz. She thinks Trump is terrible, but she blames Democratic elites for not stopping it. A political consultant and CEO of Evinco Strategies, she told me, "I'm not mad at Trump. He told us his goals and people said 'sure." Posner sees a corrupt political class in Washington as the real culprit. To her, elites, old and young, make power an end in itself. She told me, "It isn't just old people who won't give up power. You have young staffers around them who turn them [elderly officeholders] into meat puppets for their own gain. They are 100 percent doing this to hold onto power."

Revisiting Bidenworld is not an act of political masochism. Rather, assessing how Democratic elites slowwalked into political disaster is to understand what ails American democracy.

As for Kamala Harris's 100-day run, Posner pronounces it an "absolutely textbook campaign, for 2012." Far from blaming Harris, she thinks Democrats lost because "we don't know where our people are because we haven't talked to them in 20 years." Indeed, no Democrat has run a 50-state primary campaign since Obama in 2008. Had Biden dropped out in 2023, a barnburner of a Democratic primary would have made the eventual nominee sharper and built the party. In June 2024, Joe Biden performed political self-immolation on national television. One hundred days later, an untested vice president very nearly won on the back of a campaign held together by scotchtape and cardboard. Trump was beatable.

In 2025, Wertz's awe and horror abound. But possibly the worst lasting effect is what Posner admitted to me, "The Democratic Party did this shit to itself. Now, we don't trust each other because they lied to us. I don't know if it's true that we believe in the same things."

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## **Marching Orders, Then and Now**

Erie stands up for democracy

By: Liz Allen

ain a victory over fear and walk firm and erect. ... Remember that you are only one in a great army – that you are marching for a principle and that principle (is) 'Government of the People for the People and by the Whole People."

Today, such advice might have appeared on social media posts, in Substack essays, or on podcasts, drumming up support for Erie's two No Kings protests on June 14, for a pop-up rally, "Keep Families Together," at West 12th and Peninsula on June 19 by the local chapter of Network Lobby, or for the "Sisters Speak Out; Prayer and Public Witness for Immigrants and a Just Economy" vigil on June 24, across from the Erie County Prison at West 18th and Ash streets.

But those words advocating for government "by the Whole People" date to July 5, 1913, when Augusta Fleming wrote a letter to the editor of the Erie Dispatch. Her mission: persuade Erie women to join her, other local suffragettes, and supporters from Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo in the Perry Centennial Parade, set for Tuesday afternoon, three days after the letter ran.

Fleming spoke with authority and conviction. "All women should feel the duty to pass on to their daughters the rich heritage of political freedom," she stated in her letter, adding that there would be the sound of "feet, a thousand times ten thousand and thousands and thousands" standing up for women's right to vote.

In 1913, she served as president of the Erie Equal Franchise Association and by 1920, she had become chair of what was described as a "temporary" organization, the League of Women Voters. The league worked to assure that Erie women followed the proper procedures to be eligible to vote for the first time in the November election, following the certification of the 19th Amendment on Aug. 26 that year.

To explain those procedures, a "mass meeting" was held at the Erie County Courthouse with 18 organizations represented, including the Woman's Club, the YWCA, Zonta, the Erie Infants Home, the Housewives League, the Public Library, and the PTA, according to newspaper accounts.

I can't definitively assert that Fleming and other suffragists from Erie would have joined the No Kings protests or advocated to protect the rights of immigrants, as many are doing in Erie these days. But anecdotally, I see evidence that these women would have felt right at home making banners and carrying signs to stand up for democracy and to speak out for the marginalized.

Today, one energizing part of attending a rally or protest is spotting all the clever signs. At the

Perry Centennial Parade, the suffragists also knew how to make a visual splash, wearing cos-



Mary Nelson (left) and Rita Scrimenti, members of the local chapter of Network Lobby, the Nuns on the Bus Catholic social justice organization, attend a prayer vigil on June 24 across from the Erie County Prison.

tumes and sashes and pulling a plaster replica of the Liberty Bell on a float, which the Erie Daily Times described as a "prominent feature" that day.

The parade's date was also significant; July 8 was the 137th anniversary of the day the Liberty Bell rang out in Philadelphia for the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence. In 1920, another bell, known as the Justice Bell, would travel to every corner of Pennsylvania, including Erie, with a pledge that the bell would remain silent until the 19th Amendment was ratified.

In 2020, a 200-pound resin replica of the Justice Bell was displayed at the Hagen History Center to commemorate the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. More information about the original Justice Bell and how it was salvaged can be found at justicebell.org.

In her letter to the editor, Fleming referred to the "unselfish motive" behind those supporting women's right to vote. "You are trying to gain citizenship that you may do your part to bring about better legislation for the protection of the home, children, and the weak," she wrote. The reference to women needing to "gain citizenship" strikes a nerve. Without the right to vote, women did not enjoy the full benefits of citizenship.

Now I watch in disgust as the Trump administration rounds up people with the legal right to be here, even if they aren't yet citizens.

At the prayer vigil across from the Erie County Prison, organized by the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Sisters of Mercy, and Benedictines for Peace, participants learned about a Haitian woman in Erie who is being deported even though she had received legal asylum. "She has a job," said Sister Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB. In Haiti, she can only be returned to the household where she worked for 19 years as an unpaid servant, Sanchez-Small said.



In 1913, this headline appeared in the evening edition of the Erie Daily Times reporting on a protest led by suffragette Augusta Fleming who, while rallying attendees for the march, said that there would be the sound of "feet, a thousand times ten thousand and thousands and thousands" standing up for women's right to vote.

Sister Natalie Rossi, RSM, talked about a friend named Tom, originally from India, who earned his MBA from Gannon University and become close friends with the Sisters of Mercy in Erie, attending Catholic Mass with them and joining them for Sunday brunch.

After getting married in India, and with a good job awaiting him in Erie, he returned with his new wife and "then began the nightmare," Rossi said. The newlyweds received emails telling them they had three days to self-deport or face a daily fine of \$900 - each. They left Erie but were able to settle in Dubai and work remotely for the Erie company that had hired him.

"If you see something that is not right, we can't afford to be quiet," Rossi said, quoting civil rights icon and late Congressman John Lewis. "Let's get into some good trouble."

Deb Seng, social justice coordinator for the Sisters of St. Joseph, said the prayer vigil in Erie was one of many "echo rallies" held across the country in conjunction with a Sisters Speak Out vigil on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol at the same

Planning began in March at a meeting of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. "A sister stood up and said, 'We cannot be silent anymore. We have the moral authority to speak truth and right and we have to have our voices heard."

Erin Falk, 23, of Buffalo, was among 50 people who attended the vigil. She is one of three young women known as Benedictine Peacemakers, who are spending a year in Erie learning about monastic life. Seeing elderly people, many of them religious sisters, at the prayer service inspired her, she said. On a 90-degree afternoon, they "came out to protest. They're still willing to fight," she said.

No matter their age or the organizations they represent, Erie people have proven their willingness to fight for what is right for more than a century.

When she died in 1949, Augusta Fleming's age was estimated to be 72, but her birth date "was not ascertainable," according to her death certificate. She would likely be appalled at Republicanbacked legislation demanding that people produce their birth certificates to be able to register to vote.

But doing the math, I do know this: In 1913, Fleming would have been around age 36 when she led the Erie suffragists in demanding voting rights for women. If there had been a 40 Under 40 list compiled then, she surely would have been one of those honored.

Liz Allen attended her first protest rally, against the draft, with her brother in 1968. She can be reached at lizerie@aol.com

# **SSJ Neighborhood Network**



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#### **Bird of the Month: Common Tern**

Anything but common

By: Mary Birdsong

Swift and graceful flyers, Common Terns are a delight to watch as they skim over the waters of Presque Isle or hover, then dive for a fish dinner.

These fast flyers can often be mistaken for gulls if one doesn't have a keen eye. They, like gulls, have predominantly white or gray bodies, but if examined more closely, their crisp black caps and bright orange-red bills and legs set them apart from the more plentiful Ring-billed and American Herring Gulls that inhabit the park. They look smaller too, with a wing span of approximately 30 inches (Gull wingspans are 48-58 inches). Two features that also set them apart are their forked tails which are easy to see when they fly, and wings tips that are more pointed than gulls.

Their name suggests that these birds are, well, common, or abundant. Common Terns are indeed the most widespread tern species in North America, but the species' conservation status is "common but in steep decline." Here in Pennsylvania, that status is even more fragile as Common Terns are listed as endangered, since the only area in the state that has appropriate habitat for nesting is Presque Isle State Park.

And, indeed, this species is emblematic in the creation of the conservation movement. In the late 19th century, many wading and sea birds – including the Common Tern – were hunted for their feathers to use in women's hats. Since Common Terns were

small birds, often the entire bird ended up on hats, becoming a distinctive symbol for conservation advocates.

Common Terns regularly nested at Presque Isle in the past. In the 1930s, a colony of more than 125 nests stretched a quarter mile on the eastern end of the park, according to an account in the book *Birds of Western Pennsylvania* by Clyde Todd. Unfortunately, there are also accounts of people walking through the colony and scaring away nesting birds and crushing eggs as they went.

Increases in the recreational use of Presque Isle only compounded the problem and terns did not nest again until the past decade and a half. In 2015, a high count of eight nests had everyone hopeful, but all nests failed due to predation or high water.

In 2022, a milestone was reached when a pair of terns successfully reached hatch. Seeing tern chicks toddling around at Gull Point made me and other birders giddy with delight.

That delight did not last long, though, as an unknown predator gobbled those chicks within a few days

In 2024, the same predation occurred, but the tern adults decided to try again. For this nest, the PA Game Commission designed an exclosure to protect the nest and newly hatched chicks. On Aug. 17, two juvenile terns fledged from that protection and flew free – the first Common Terns to fledge at Presque Isle in more than a half century.

If you want to see one, the best place to look is



The Common Tern, which is common "but in steep decline," successfully fledged on Presque Isle last year, ending a 50 year long streak of difficulty and predation. Look for these shorebirds among the gulls, standing out from their close cousins due to their black caps and bright orange-red bills.

Presque Isle at Leo's Landing or at Gull Point. Be sure to listen for their strident "keeyurr" flight call then look up. Watching these graceful flyers buoys my soul and makes me grateful for those early conservationists who fought so hard to make it possible for us to still have these birds in our midst.

Mary Birdsong is the lead shorebird monitor for Erie Bird Observatory. Learn more at eriebirdobservatory.org or on their social media channels. She can be reached at mbirdsong@eriereader.com

#### **Edwina Tries... Gallery Night with Dan Schank**

Local artist and professor opens a new watercolor show at The 1020 Collective

By: Edwina Capozziello

I have certainly been to many opening receptions and gallery nights in our fair city but I have never had the pleasure of meeting fellow Erie Reader contributor Dan Schank or seeing his work until this most recent gallery night. Schank's newest watercolor series, *Dissolves*, is now on view at The 1020 Collective (1020 Holland St.) until July 27. I also got to try The Que Abides for the first time and it was delicious but, that's a story for another issue.

Schank explains in his artist statement that his new works "are inspired by a film editing technique called the cross dissolve, where a new image is slowly superimposed over a previous scene to indicate a transition in a movie. With this motif in mind, I explore how a hyper-focus on individual self-growth has superseded more radical modes of social transformation." The paintings are colorful, striking, multilayered and to this admittedly untrained eye, led me to draw parallels to the show *Severance* (if you know, you know).

In contrast, or maybe in concert, with these deep psychological themes, is the artist himself. Schank is approachable, kind, warm, and funny. I was immediately comfortable in his presence and imagined being one of his students would be an absolute pleasure. Schank, an associate teaching professor of art and English at Penn State Behrend, has had

"[The watercolor series *Dissolve* is] inspired by a film editing technique called the cross dissolve, where a new image is slowly superimposed over a previous scene to indicate a transition in a movie." – Dan Schank in artist statement

his work shown all over the country. That includes other solo exhibitions in Philadelphia and at our own Erie Art Museum.

"Ultimately, my work examines three distinct eras of psychological inquiry – the psychoanalytical 1950s, the hedonistic 1970s, and our paranoid, volatile present," explained the artist. *Dissolves* is absolutely worth checking out and 1020 is as inviting



This month, Edwina stops in to gallery night at 1020 Collective to check out the latest show by artist (and fellow Erie Reader contributor) Dan Schank entitled *Dissolves*.

a space as ever, maybe even more so as they have recently added a coffee bar.

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

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#### Take Your Beer For a Walk: Little Italy

Stopping by at Majestic Bakery, La Nuova Aurora, Ruiz Barber Shop, and more

By: Jeff McCullor

If it's been a minute since you were last in Erie's Little Italy Neighborhood, let's lace up those sneakies, grab your favorite barley pop from your local brewery, and hit the streets!

We'll begin our tour on the northwest corner of Chestnut and Huron streets, where you'll find the delicious aromas of Majestic Baking Company wafting straight at you. They're probably inside cranking out amazing sourdough loaves alongside popular banana pepper and asiago pinwheels and their wonderfully dense hippie bread. Get in there during their usual operating hours for a yummy side quest of local carbohydrates. Cheers to you, Majestic!

Next we'll do an about-face and walk south on Chestnut, crossing Huron, strolling right past the La Nuova Aurora Society, home to meticulously maintained outdoor and indoor bocce courts, and a centerpiece of Erie's rich Italian heritage since 1907. Kitty-corner from here you'll see the gorgeous St. Paul's Catholic Church with the corner-oriented bell tower and double stacked stained glass windows

adorning the exterior walls. Cheers to you, St. Paul's and La Nuova Aurora!

Now take a long sip of that beer, we're going to get in some serious steps! Continue heading south along Chestnut Street, aiming for a right turn onto West 18th Street. We'll be strolling our way to the intersection at West 18th and Cherry streets where you'll find Ruiz Barber Shop and International Bakery (yes another bakery, listen I love carbs, alright?). The folks at Ruiz dole out some of the most impressive fades seen on a human head, oftentimes using a straight razor. Two doors down along West 18th, International Bakery is cranking out pepperoni bread, danishes, cannoli, and some wildly popular Italian loaves fit for a perfect sandwich. Cheers to you, International and Ruiz!

Next stop: West 19th Street, so turn around back to Cherry Street and head south one block, then turn left onto West 19th Street where a TRAIN used to run right down the middle of the street. Yeah, like a real train, carrying boxcars! Wild, right? Traverse your way along the southern edge of the Erie Cemetery until you come back to Chestnut. Right



Local brewer Jeff McCullor takes us on another bubbly walk around Erie, this time landing in the Little Italy neighborhood – exploring the area while taking advantage of Erie's lack of open container law.

near the corner is Give A Crepe, La Creperie, Erie's only crêperie. Stephani Klassen (40 Under 40 Class of 2023) is the owner, a pro crêpe spinner and an incredible contributor to Erie's culinary scene. Get the "saumon sale" crepe – it's so, so good. Cheers to you Stephani!

Keep drinking, and walking, local.

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

#### **The Reader Beat Monthly Recap**

Summary of June council 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 June.

#### **County Council, June 3:**

This meeting was packed with constituents preparing to listen or speak on Ordinance 27, which would provide \$433,620 for housing immigrant detainees in contract with ICE. Constituent Meredith Blake illustrated how undocumented immigrants contribute to Social Security, public infrastructure, and taxes, all while not reaping the benefits. "I wish for [County Executive Brenton Davis] and the councilmembers following his ignorance to realize that a detainee sitting in a jail generating this county \$99 a day is nothing compared to the value and contributions that they would provide this county if they were recognized with legal working status," Blake said. The ordinance did not pass with a vote distribution of 2-5. Councilmembers Terry Scutella, Rock Copeland, André Horton, Chris Drexel, and Jim Winarski voted no.

#### City Council, June 4:

At the beginning of this meeting, Tara Hofferth of Kittelson and Associates presented an imple-

mentation plan for Safe Streets and Roads for All. According to Jackie Spry of the Erie County Redevelopment Authority, the plan would enhance pedestrian infrastructure, calm traffic, and create safer routes to schools. The city is preparing to apply for a grant to implement the plan. "This is critical for the city to adopt this plan," Spry said. "This money is still available to us at the federal level."

Continuing with the amendments to the Renter's Bill of Rights, an ordinance amending and supplementing Article 354, Rental Housing, specifically to amend section 354.05(a) that established the rights and obligations of the owners and occupants of rental housing in the City of Erie; in particular the rights under federal, state, and local laws that apply to the landlord-tenant relationship passed unanimously.

#### County Council, June 17:

County Council voted on and discussed a resolution in support of the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) passed 5-1 with Councilmember Charlie Bayle voting no. Bayle explained his vote by arguing that the audit did not cover enough and should have investigated further back in time. "While I accept the auditors report, I would've liked to have seen it gone back and looked at some other things a little more thoroughly," Bayle said. Copeland held opposing views. "Mr. Bayle's comments further the reason

for me introducing this resolution," Copeland said. "I think it's quite impressive that after an exhaustive, exhaustive search of ECGRA's finances that they didn't find any problems and the only violation of gaming laws that they found was that the county owes ECGRA money."

#### City Council, June 18:

The agenda included four resolutions acknowledging and honoring Juneteenth, LGBTQIA+ Pride Month, World Refugee Day, and the 250th anniversary of the United States. Councilmember Mo Troop, who sponsored the Juneteenth resolution, explained that the annual Juneteenth celebration has grown since it first began. "I'd like to thank the organizers," Troop began, "and especially the community. Events are only good when the community really comes out." Councilmember Tyler Titus also addresses the LGBTQIA+ Pride Month resolution and the recent Supreme Court decision to uphold the Tennessee law that bans gender affirming care for minors. "I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the young people. I hear you, I see you, I believe you, and there are many, many, many adults and community members and allies who are fighting for you," Titus said.

Coming up this month:

City Council: Wednesday, July 2 at 9 a.m.
County Council: Tuesday, July 15 at 6 p.m.
City Council: Wednesday, July 16 at 6:30 p.m.

### Erie's 40 Under 40 Class of 2025

Honoring 40 of Erie's leaders, creative thinkers, and helping hands



very year for the past 13 years, the editors of the Erie Reader have had the honor of sifting through hundreds of inspiring nominations and choosing the 40 that we think best represent the bright futures they are building for themselves and for the Erie community at large. It is truly a privilege to be able to high-light these 40 people from all walks of life, all backgrounds, and all means – this list is a continued testament that helping doesn't require a platform, money, or political status – it only requires a desire to make Erie a better place.

And every year for the past 13 years, we've been inspired by the myriad ways young people in Erie are doing that. We have artists, lawyers, business owners, volunteers, musicians, politicians, investors, coaches, teachers, therapists, performers, activists, and so many more working within their lanes to make Erie better. And when you put them all together – that's where change happens.

So, without further ado, let's all welcome these incredible young movers and shakers, as they join the ranks of the 480 who came before them. May the roads you pave fall underfoot of those to come.

Written by: Jonathan Burdick (JB), Edwina Capozziello (EC), Chloe Forbes (CF), Ally Kutz (AK), Erin Phillips (EP), Alana Sabol (AS), Cara Suppa (CS), Amy VanScoter (AVS), and Nick Warren (NW). All photography by Jessica Hunter

Do you know someone you would like to see in an upcoming class? Our online nominations for 2026's class are now open! Just visit eriereader.com/40under40nomination

#### Hiba Alsabonge, 37

Refugee Resettlement Director, Catholic Charities Counseling and Adoption Services



As a refugee herself, Hiba Alsabonge has dedicated her career to helping other refugees resettle in Erie. She grew up in Baghdad, Iraq and obtained her bachelor's degree in laser engineering. Now, Alsabonge works as the refugee resettlement director at the nonprofit Catholic Charities Counseling and Adoption Services.

Alsabonge describes her work as challenging but rewarding, and takes pride in witnessing refugee families gain stability and access to resources. She also focuses on building a strong, culturally sensitive and trauma-informed team. "Each success story reminds me why this work matters, and it motivates me to keep improving services and advocating for systemic change," Alsabonge says.

To recharge outside of work, she prioritizes selfcare through exercise, reading, connecting with friends, or spending time in nature. Alsabonge is also an avid learner and enjoys podcasts and cultural events. "While my work is very people-focused, I also value quiet time, reflection, and staying connected to what brings me joy and personal growth," she says.

Alsabonge is committed to her work and plans on continuing to serve the community in Erie for the

foreseeable future. "In my role, I work to make Erie a more welcoming and inclusive community for refugees and immigrants by helping individuals and families rebuild their lives with dignity and support," she says. "I believe that when we invest in people – regardless of where they come from – we invest in the strength and future of our city." – AS

#### **Emmanuel Beason. 37**

Rehabilitation Technician, Bayada Home Health Care // Owner, Erie Elite Athletics



Whether it's on or off the field, Erie native Emmanuel Beason wants to give people the skills they need

to succeed. From running youth athletic camps to owning a clothing business, working as a rehabilitation technician, and creating opportunities that enrich the lives of underserved youth, he is a force to be reckoned with.

Notably, he is the owner of Erie Elite Athletics, an organization hosting men's and women's flag football leagues in addition to offering free youth camps. During the youth camps, college athletes from all over – New Hampshire University, Texas Southern University, and Penn State University, to name a few – share their knowledge of football with the youngsters. He's also run a camp tackling decision-making in addition to football drills. He hosts fundraisers in order to keep costs low or nonexistent for youth players.

He understands what it can be like to fumble into hard times and wants to drive people to live up to their potential. That's why in 2017, he brought one of his dreams to life by creating a clothing company. As a fashion lover since his youth, he always wanted his own brand. Owning Emrei's Imprints, he prints shirts with his own brand – Racers Clothing Company – and further supports local sports teams by printing their jerseys, special team T-shirts, and more.

It's not just on the field that he makes change, though. In his day job, he works for Bayada Home Health Care, assisting those with developmental disabilities. Each year, he also hosts a toy drive during the holidays, so parents in need can still make magic for their children.

"Manny is making athletic and social opportunities happen for kids and adults in Erie," said nominator Chelsea Oliver. "Whether through his clothing brand or athletic organization, he is giving back to the community in ways that no one else is." – CF

Ethan Bennett, 25
Loan Officer,
Erie County Redevelopment Authority (ECRDA)



Ethan Bennett's love for Erie inspires him to help keep local dollars local, which he knows is the key to successfully growing Erie's economy. "From the moment I stepped on Gannon's campus, I fell in love with the city," he said. "I knew that this was a place where things were happening, and somewhere I wanted to be for the long term to help drive the change and progress I could clearly see."

Originally from Stoney Creek, Ontario, Ethan attended Gannon University, graduating with his bachelor's degree in 2021 and his master's in 2022,

receiving the Academic Excellence Award in the Public Administration Program. Having fallen in love with Erie – "I'm an Erieite by choice," he proudly states – Ethan connected with ECRDA and was offered his current position with them not long after graduation.

Although his official title is loan officer, Ethan does much more than just lend to local businesses: "I provide businesses with access to affordable capital, which works alongside private dollars to stimulate investment and encourage economic growth," he said. This includes working on projects that involve business development, relationship management, credit analysis, and underwriting, all of which help to facilitate community growth powered by other community members and businesses.

In his time with ECRDA, Ethan has closed on more than \$6,000,000 in loans and helped to leverage an additional \$28,000,000 in private investment for local businesses across different industries and sectors throughout Erie County. "This really represents the best of what can happen when public and private dollars collaborate to make things happen," he said. Outside of ECRDA, Ethan is also the board chair for Community Access Media (CAM); the advisory board vice-chair for Gannon's College of Humanities, Education, and Social Sciences; and a fund development committee member for the Emerging Erie Funds.

When he's not helping to fuel the local economy, Ethan and his wife Colleen Dougherty (a 2024 40 Under 40 alum) are avid golfers, spending much of their time at Lawrence Park Golf Club, where they are members. They also enjoy playing board games with friends and taking walks in their West Bayfront neighborhood. – AK

Adam Boaks, 25
Teacher, NWPA Collegiate Academy // Teaching
Pastor, The Cross



Whether by teaching, volunteering, or leading worship, Adam Boaks is living an active life of service.

As a science teacher at Northwest Pennsylvania Collegiate Academy, he specializes in biology, chemistry, and environmental sciences. "My hope is to empower my students to see their potential as future leaders, innovators, and caretakers of this community and the world," Boaks asserted. "I want to invest in the next generation so that they are equipped and inspired to transform Erie into a

place where everyone can thrive."

A Pittsburgh native, Boaks relocated to Erie after graduating from Avonworth High School, eventually earning his bachelor's degree in biology from Penn State Behrend in 2022. While teaching science at Erie's Wilson Middle School, he earned his master's from Mercyhurst University two years later.

Both a man of science and a man of faith, Boaks is also a teaching pastor and worship leader with The Cross in Downtown Erie's St. Paul's Church. A singer and guitarist, Boaks, with fellow Behrend alum Alison Huffman, recorded a full-length album of Psalms, For Your Glory as The Cross Worship. For several years, he has volunteered with their Urban Missions Team and in various shelters for the unhoused, such as the Erie United Methodist Alliance's Our Neighbors Place and St. Paul's the Upper Room.

Currently pursuing a master's in divinity from Gordon Cornwall Theological Seminary, Boaks is focused on creating positive change in his community.

"On the ministry side of things, I want to continue working to see needs met and relationships formed as we come together to take care of each other."

On top of all of that, Boaks was a volunteer fire-fighter with Erie's Brookside Fire Co. Station 24 and the Emsworth Volunteer Fire Company in Pittsburgh. Boaks is co-owner of Vivid Life, a side business for wedding photography and DJ services. He loves spending time with his wife Hannah, their dog Moose, and cat Leonard. He's the advisor to Collegiate's Ski Club, keeps saltwater aquariums, is an advocate for biking to work, and loves to cook. – NW

Olivia Burgess, 25
Director of Collective Giving,
The Erie Community Foundation



The Erie Community Foundation (ECF) is the bridge connecting local nonprofits and the philanthropic community. It's one of – if not, the – preeminent forces motivating donors to help fund hundreds of locally-run organizations. As the director of giving for the ECF, Burgess helps supervise their Affinity Funds: The Erie Women's Fund, The LGBT Fund, and the Emerging Erie Fund.

"It's easy to feel powerless in today's world," Burgess admitted, explaining that she is "so grateful for the opportunity to be a small part of the positive energy and tangible change I see around me every day."

#### **40 UNDER 40**

In her 3.5 years with the ECF, she received two promotions in that relatively short time. Under her stewardship, she's seen the Erie Women's Fund grow to over 200 members. The Emerging Erie Fund now boasts more than 120 members, each with upand-coming projects worth supporting, and this year, their LGBT Fund will see its largest grant yet.

The Erie County native attended Union City High School, where she met her high school sweetheart, Josh. She proceeded to Allegheny College, receiving her degree in English literature and being named valedictorian of her graduating class. At Allegheny, she served as editor of The Campus student newspaper, as well as being named lead writing consultant and working as an assistant at the Office of the President.

Six months after getting hired at the ECF, Olivia married that sweetheart of hers. They currently have "one very spoiled cat" and enjoy skiing and playing pickleball. Like any good writer, she's also an avid reader, one who also enjoys baking a nice loaf of sourdough and loves Christmas to an almost alarming degree.

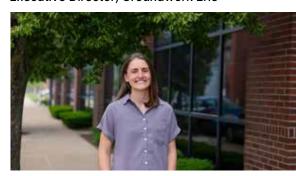
Burgess recently became a Chartered Advisor in Philanthropy (CAP), a year-long, graduate level certification with the American College of Financial Services.

She is a member of ATHENA Erie Committee, a well-known group amongst 40 Under 40 honorees that champions women leaders in our community.

"I want to continue to learn from the incredible

leaders I work with," Burgess noted, "and show up in every room as a passionate advocate for how special Erie really is." – NW

Erin Carey, 31
Executive Director, Groundwork Erie



"Groundwork is a noun that means the early work done to prepare for later work," Malek Hafez defined, speaking to his time with Groundwork Erie's Green Team. It's only fitting then, that so many young people like him are given the opportunity to make positive change in our community. Whether by maintaining greenspaces, planting trees, or beautifying areas such as the East Bayfront Greenway Trail, Groundwork Erie is teaching young people to help their community.

Erin Carey did a great deal of that early work herself. During her time as a Neighborhood Planner with the City of Erie through Americorps, she shepherded Groundwork USA's early involvement with the city (in addition to the projects Count Me In and Love Your Block). Assisting with the feasibility study that would lead to the very formation of Groundwork Erie, she now finds herself as the executive director for that very organization. "Being in a position," Carey explained, "to now lead the implementation of all the ideas formed five years ago alongside community members is incredibly meaningful to me."

Sometimes, our groundwork isn't laid out so clearly. That's something Carey can personally attest to when she first set out on what would be an 850-mile solo bike ride from Detroit to Montreal.

Originally from the Des Moines suburb of Ankeny, lowa, Carey made her way north to St. Paul's College of St. Benedict. After earning her degree in education, she volunteered with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, staying in their monastery. Carey has taught English to refugees at the Saint Benedict Education Center, also giving music, piano, and guitar lessons at the Neighborhood Art House. She's currently the board treasurer of the Trinity Square Foundation, and a member of the City of Erie's Environmental Advisory Council.

As Groundwork Erie begins their third year for the Green Team, they also share partnerships with the Urban Farms and Pay-What-You-Can Markets, Erie Farm to School, the Community Forestry Corps, local neighborhood groups, and the aforementioned Greenway Trail. "Through this program and other projects at Groundwork," Carey resolved, "I aim to contribute to a better future for our youth by enhancing Erie's environmental health and economic well-being." – NW

# CONGRATULATIONS BRANDON

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# CONGRATULATIONS!



# BETHANY WOODS 40 UNDER 40 HONOREE

Congratulations to Bethany Woods, Mercyhurst University's Director of Academic Community Engagement, on being recognized in Erie's 40 Under 40, Class of 2025! We're proud to have you on our community engagement team.



Congratulations Olivia!

We are so proud of you and all that you do for our community. Cheers to you!

From, your friends at The Erie Community Foundation.



OLIVIA BURGESS

Director of Collective Giving
The Erie Community Foundation

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#### Maurice Clarke, 38 Counselor and Minority Veterans Program Coordinator, Erie VA Medical Center



When we talk with our honorees, we ask them a handful of questions with the intention of gathering a few useful quotes. When Maurice Clarke responded, it wasn't a few nuggets of wisdom, it was a veritable gold mine. Clarke is remarkably inspiring, both with his words and his actions. Working as a licensed professional counselor and the Minority Veterans Program Coordinator at the Erie VA Medical Center, his responsibilities include running group therapy in their Intensive Outpatient Program and serving as the manager of the Black Special Emphasis Program. There, he is an "advocate for minority veterans through outreach, education, and culturally responsive care," Clarke explained. At the VA, he has helped to introduce regular events celebrating Juneteenth, Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Women's History Month, "helping promote equity and inclusion across the VA."

Additionally, he works as a child and adolescent therapist at LECOM Health's Achievement Center. "My work there focuses on fostering resilience, improving emotional regulation, and supporting healthy development in children navigating mental health challenges."

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Clarke graduated from Villa Maria Academy before attending Gannon University. There, he received his associate degree in legal studies, his bachelor's degree in criminal justice, and finally his master's in clinical mental health counseling, with honors. Clarke is currently seeking a doctorate of criminal justice at Pennwest Edinboro.

Together with Jacquelyn Williams, he launched Jesus in Every Room – hosted by Christian Ministries of the Apostolic Faith Church – a faith-based program that aims to bring valuable lessons to the home. With his wife, he is co-owner of A Touch of Class Event Planning Services, which designs custom event spaces.

"I strive to make Erie a place where healing is not a privilege, but a promise – where every voice is valued, every story matters, and mental health support is rooted in compassion, culture, and community. My mission is to stand in the gap for those who feel unseen and to remind them that hope is real, help is here, and they are never alone." – NW

#### Joseph Czarnecki, 38

Visitor Services, Erie Art Museum // Silkscreen Printmaker, Self Employed // Caretaker, Voices for Independence

To say that Joseph Czarnecki is a busy guy is an understatement. Since graduating from Edinboro University where he studied printmaking, the General McLane alumni has been working locally as a silkscreen printmaker. In this role, he has always aspired to offer affordable printmaking services to local bands so that they can sell more merch, which, in turn, brings them back – a satisfying mutual loyalty. "When I am out in public and I see my work being worn by strangers, it feels like a full circle," Czarnecki says.



At the Erie Art Museum, he works in visitor services and assists in exhibition installation. He is also caretaker through Voices for Independence and a proud union member of United Home Care Workers of PA. On top of that, Czarnecki is embedded in the local music scene. He performs solo as Kultur Vultur, while also playing guitar in two local bands, Bloc Czar and Performance Software. For the latter, he is also the principal songwriter and does the composition, vocals, sampling, and electronic sequencing.

When he has spare time, he enjoys retro console video games (Sega, Sony, and the original NES) and, on his PC, more modern games. He also is an electronics hobbyist doing repair work soldering microchips. "I find fixing broken things to be very rewarding," Czarnecki says. In addition, he is a contemporary artist and enjoys oil painting, digital art, animation, and doing video editing for his YouTube channel (@kultur-vultur), which showcases a little bit of everything that he does.

As someone who has struggled with ADHD and mental health, there have been challenges, but, as he explains, he was gradually able to find the balance and to create a routine that has led to his success.

"In Erie, you get out what you put in," says Czarnecki. "I find that the 'work' in the community that I do paves the way for more things to come my way and then leaves me feeling more connected to Erie and my peers." – JB

#### Damali Donovan, 32

Admissions Director, Villa Maria Cathedral Preparatory School System

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and it's



Damali Donovan's mission to strengthen every link in the chain to create true resilience. She addresses limiting factors in Erie like youth homelessness and access to education to ensure a prosperous and fair future for every member of the community.

Born in Saint Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands, she currently works as the admissions director for Villa Maria Cathedral Preparatory School System and previously worked with United Way of Erie County with their Public Schools initiative. In those roles, she gained a perspective that has enabled her to make profound changes in how students access education in the area. As a Raimy Fellow for the Jefferson Educational Society, she presented throughout the county about solutions to address youth homelessness. She also developed a strategic funding rubric to guide equitable allocation of resources across schools and partner organizations in the county and played a key role in expanding access to student services.

Notably, she coordinated with health care professionals and school district leaders to launch Glasses to Classes, which provided students with vision screenings and free eyewear. During that time period, she also contributed to the Safer Walking Routes program that promoted student safety and strengthened community engagement.

"Both Erie and the U.S. Virgin Islands have shaped who I am, and I feel a deep responsibility to give back. My hope is to contribute to communities where young people feel seen, supported, and empowered – no matter their background or circumstance," Donovan shared. "Whether it's through education, health, advocacy, or cross-sector partnerships, I want to be part of building systems that don't just meet needs, but unlock potential and create lasting opportunity."

Before she entered the world of education and advocacy, though, she learned how to command a room through baton twirling and exhibiting her artwork in contests. Her personal expression and performance under pressure have paid off as she continues to entertain and create spaces for connection. –CF

#### Tamer Fahmy, 27

IT Systems Administrator at Erie Insurance // Owner, Erie DJ Company

Not only is Tamer Fahmy an IT whiz, he is also an active volunteer and disc jockey. Fahmy graduated with a bachelor's degree in computer science from



Slippery Rock University after growing up outside of Pittsburgh in Moon Township.

"I love building systems – whether it's streamlining a business workflow, automating IT tasks, or setting up a killer DJ booth. I'm always thinking about how to make things run smoother," Fahmy says. This passion is reflected in the many hats he wears. Fahmy is an IT systems administrator at Erie Insurance and has his own independent IT consulting and web developing service.

He is also actively engaged in community and civic causes through his roles as a board member at the Jefferson Educational Society and the president of the Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy (JCLA) Alumni Network. Fahmy is a leader in community-driven initiatives like Erie Insurance's Thanksgiving Turkey Drive.

When he's not being a tech guru or community leader, he's DJing as the owner and operator of Erie DJ Company. "I believe music and technology have the power to bring people together and build real community," Fahmy says.

In his spare time, Fahmy juggles creative and outdoorsy hobbies including kayaking, longboarding, playing guitar, and of course, DJing.

"Through DJing, leadership, and mentorship, I create opportunities for people to connect, collaborate, and grow," Fahmy says, adding that he sees himself in Erie for the foreseeable future. "Erie has so much potential – and I'm excited to be part of its next chapter." – AS

Kaitlyn Falk, 29
District Wellness Manager, Erie's Public Schools



Hailing from our neighbor to the north, the great city of Buffalo, Kaitlyn Falk has lived in Erie for 12 years, since she began attending Gannon University. In that time, she has shown a dedicated commitment to the overall wellness of the Erie community – first at college, where she earned her Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Human Performance, and then later in her professional life. She currently serves the city's youth as the district wellness manager for Erie's Public Schools. Falk has found much success implementing the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model, and her work has been featured in the National Afterschool Association Magazine, as well as at national conferences, such as those for the Society of Health and Physical Educators and the American School Health Association.

"Improving health systems is a multi-pronged approach," Falk said, "but my lane has always been to equip, empower, and excite kids with the skills and habits to 'make the healthy choice the easy choice' for the rest of their lives." Part of the way she does this, according to one of her nominators, is by bringing playfulness into everything she does, "creating meaningful connections between her community and the students of the Erie School District."

She also encourages physical activity and wellness in her personal life, as the co-creator of West Bay Fit and West Bay Walks with Our West Bayfront, as well as a volunteer for free fitness programming in the parks through the Erie Downtown Partnership. In addition to spending time with her twin "adventure cats," Buffalo and Ralph Wilson, Falk also enjoys hiking, as well as indoor activities, like reading about dragons – and she's even working on writing her own book. – CS

**Grant Filbeck, 26**District Manager, Junior Achievement of Western PA



Having grown up in Millcreek Township and graduated from Collegiate Academy, Grant Filbeck is no stranger to Erie. He studied communications (with a minor in history) at Penn State University before attending Gannon University where he earned a master's degree in public administration. After serving Erie's refugee community for two years with USCRI-Erie, he is now the district manager of Junior Achievement of Western PA where he coordinates K-12 educational programs for students across the region. He also lectures part-time at Penn State Behrend.

Filbeck values community. He is involved with Erie's Multicultural Health Evaluation Delivery System, Young Erie Professionals, Erie Chamber Ambassadors, and the Penn State Behrend Public Policy Initiative. He is also very much interested in politics and is involved with the Erie County Democrats, Erie County Young Democrats, and Millcreek Democrats. He staffed for First Lady Dr. Jill Biden during her 2021 visit to Erie, joined Conor Lamb's 2022 Senate campaign, and has worked extensively alongside State Rep. Ryan Bizzarro. He can name all 100 senators, has watched every televised presidential debate going back to 1960, and even collects political memorabilia from both parties including pinbacks, posters, and bumper stickers.

"My professional journey has been shaped by a deep passion for public service and civic engagement," says Filbeck. "Public service is at the core of everything I do. I believe in the future of our county."

"His life mission is to make Erie a better place for future generations," says Millcreek Township Supervisor Kim Clear. "To know Grant is to know true community service. This is a young man committed to truly making this world a better place, so that everyone feels like they belong."

Family is extremely important too. He is married to his high school sweetheart Hannah and they share their home with five rescue cats. He enjoys lunches and frequent phone calls with his parents and finds joy in having married into a family with their own beloved traditions.

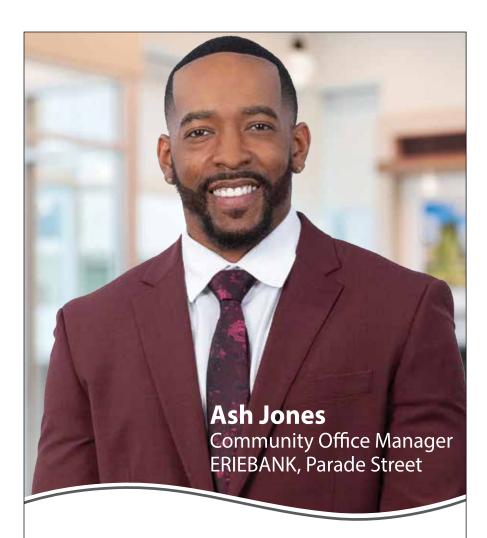
"Erie County is my home," Filbeck says. "Here in Erie, I believe we're laying the groundwork for a renaissance. I look forward to raising a family here, contributing to the community, and helping prepare the next generation to lead with confidence, compassion, and courage." – JB

Tess Frawley, 34
Founder, Eat Your Yard // Educator, Inner-City
Neighborhood Art House



Environmentalist, farmer, business owner, teacher, landscaper, and naturalist Tess Frawley's life goal is "to empower people to take control of their own health and well-being, to realize the healing powers of natural elements, and to recognize beauty in all the myriad creatures of this planet." And she works every day to help achieve that goal with her individual clients, the students she teaches, and through her own connections with nature.

Founding her business Eat Your Yard in 2020, Frawley saw the project as a chance to transform underused grassy areas into an edible landscape that not only benefits the local environment, but can also be a source of food for her clients – reducing their reliance on conventionally grown produce and



# Congratulations to Ash on being selected for 40 Under 40.

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# Congratulations, Hiba!

Hiba joined the CCCAS Resettlement program in 2015 and served as a Case Manager. Prior to that, she worked at PNC Bank, gaining valuable banking experience.

She came to the United States as a refugee from Iraq in 2014. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Laser Engineering from the University of Technology, Baghdad, Iraq, which she earned in 2010.

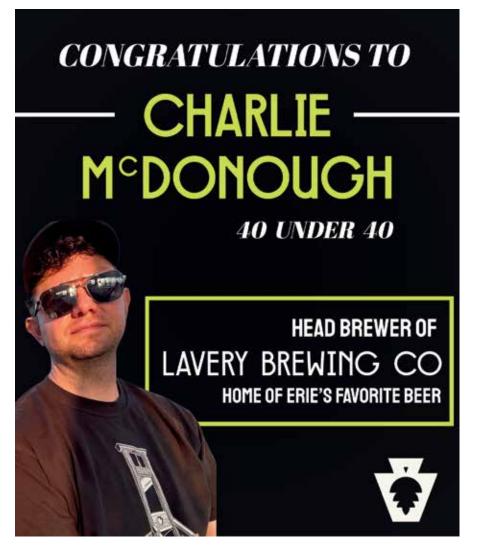
Prior to her arrival, she worked in the Baghdad Provincial Council (Administrative office).

Hiba re-joined the CCCAS team in 2021 as the Reception and Placement Supervisor Program and assumed the role of Director of Refugee Resettlement Services in January of 2025.



We are so incredibly proud of Hiba not only for this honor, but also sincerely appreciate her outstanding leadership during the most tumultuous and turbulent time in the history of CCCAS providing refugee services.







Casey Gernovich, DO, of Vineyard Primary Care, is welcoming new patients.



Casey Gernovich, DO Family Medicine

Dr. Gernovich earned his medical degree from Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine and completed his residency at AHN St. Vincent Hospital. Dr. Gernovich is certified in family medicine by the American Osteopathic Association.

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providing beautiful landscaping at the same time.

Additionally, working with the Neighborhood Art House, Frawley was hired to come up with a workable curriculum related to "urban gardening, environmental science, and preservation, cooking and food prep, wilderness skills, and more."

Frawley's nominator, Sr. Pat Lupo of the Benedictine Sisters, noted that "Tess exemplifies all the qualities we like to see in an educator: leadership, compassion, openness, vision and the desire to nurture learners, young and old. She is filled with enthusiasm, new ideas, and boundless energy."

When Tess isn't in the dirt or in the classroom, you can find her volunteering at Asbury Woods, working with Erie's Farm-to-School program to help school district families install gardens at home, foraging for wild edible plants, hanging with her cat Orange Juice (who enjoys helping her in the garden), or getting active through dance, climbing, or trail running.

Frawley's roots are in Erie, but she also enjoys traveling and has visited 12 countries to date. She envisions a future with Erie as her home base while she moves about the globe, "I trust my spirit will guide me when the time comes." – EP

Katherine Goliwas, 26
Associate Attorney,
Sebald, Hackwelder, and Knox



While people often end up coming to Katherine Goliwas at the lowest point in their lives, the family law attorney finds herself in a unique position to help folks steer their lives into a more positive direction. In her practice, she deals with a wide range of legal issues including divorce, equitable distribution, custody, spousal and child support matters, adoptions, grandparents' rights, and paternity issues.

Hailing from Pittsburgh, Katherine studied psychology, graduating Summa Cum Laude from Dayton University, and then received a Juris Doctor from the University of South Carolina in 2024.

Katherine specifically chose Erie to make her home and practicing family law here was a conscious choice, as well. "In Erie County there is a dwindling number of attorneys who practice family law. It is a demanding job and unfortunately a lot of people get burned out ... but the reward is so great." She continues, "Getting to help families who are strug-

gling has become a passion I didn't know that I had."

When she is not being kept extremely busy by her full caseload of clients, she does work with the Erie Bar Association as well as the Emerging Erie Fund. She also enjoys spending free time with her dog Frankie, walking with her at Presque Isle State Park, gardening, and cooking. She is extremely close with her family, and together they enjoy supporting the Zabawa Polish Festival every year.

Overall, Katherine finds herself in a position to help people from every background in our community. "Though people may come into my office at the lowest point in their life, I make it my goal to help them leave with a renewed sense of direction, and with a little less emotional weight than they came in with." – EP

#### **Monica Gustin, 31**

Digital Media and Design Specialist, City of Erie // Marketing and Content Creator, Herb & Honey Bakery



After graduating from Collegiate Academy, Gustin earned a BFA in Visual Media and Photography from Rochester Institute of Technology. Gustin now works as the digital media and design specialist for the City of Erie, contributing branding, marketing, and photography for events such as Lights Over Lake Erie, the 814 Concert Series, Sounds of Summer, and CelebrateErie. She also is the marketing and content creator for Herb & Honey Bakery and has done freelance work for Erie Humane Society, A.J. Grack Business Interiors, The Juice Jar, Erie Arts & Culture, Weber Murphy Fox, Presque Isle Lighthouse, and Picklejar Flower Farm.

They are a board member with Cultures, Arts, Festivals, and Events of Erie (CAFE), a member of both the City of Erie Employee Activities Committee and City of Erie Young Professionals Employee Resource Group.

"Through my time with the city, I'm most proud of the work that showcases and uplifts all the amazing things Erie has to offer through small businesses and community organizations," says Gustin. "It's been incredible to witness how we can all come together as a community and take pride in our work and the people who are close to us."

In May, she stepped outside her comfort zone and hosted her first photography show at Ember + Forge, showcasing landscape images from a trip

to New Zealand. In Gustin's spare time, they enjoy the outdoors, biking, hiking, and exploring Presque Isle and Asbury Woods. They are also an avid baker, hosting brunches with friends and baking for coworkers then posting the delicious results to their Instagram baking blog, Zhen Bakes. A particularly proud accomplishment? Gustin has kept their pandemic sourdough starter (lovingly named Chip) alive for over *five* years.

"I'm always so grateful for the community and support system I have here that I always try to uplift people who need extra support," says Gustin. "There is so much power in storytelling and learning from one another." – JB

Dalen Hooks, 34
Erie Clinic Director,
Central Outreach Wellness Center



Dalen Hooks is a standout in the Erie community and it's not because of his tall stature – it's his towering achievements that set him apart. He is the co-founder of Pittsburgh Pride, the largest pride festival in Pennsylvania, but he returned to Erie about five years ago to bring his vision of equality to his hometown. As the Erie clinic director of Central Outreach Wellness Center, he ensures the health and wellness of underserved individuals, especially those in the BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities. He has created public health campaigns to promote HIV prevention and combat HIV treatment stigma and he has hosted workshops to expand educational opportunities about sexual health for young adults.

He has an associate's degree from Pittsburgh Technical School and is studying at PennWest Edinboro for his bachelor's degree in business administration. Keeping busy, he is the founder of Erie Pride 365, vice president of Erie's Black Wall Street, a board member of Compton's Table, a board member of Destiny of Our Daughters, and vice chair of the Democratic Queer Caucus. Whether he's leaving it all out on the ballroom dance floor or professing his faith at Greater Calvary Full Gospel Baptist Church, his focus is on creating spaces where everyone feels safe.

"I show up for my community in real time. Whether it's through health care, education, advocacy, or celebration, my goal is to make Erie safer, smarter, and more inclusive – especially for Black, queer, and underserved folks who are too often overlooked," he said. "I'm not just working in Erie – I'm working for Erie." – CF

# Ash Jones, 36 Community Office Manager, ERIEBANK // Owner/ Founder, Ground 0 Visuals LLC



For Ash Jones, community is more than just a concept – it's what drives him every day. "I'm a proud Erie native – Erie is my home," he said. "I went to college in my hometown, started a family, and began my career here. I've left Erie a number of times, but I always find my way back."

Ash's drive has led him to his current role as the community office manager at the newest ERIEBANK branch on Parade Street, where his commitment to his community has shone through. His role centers on bridging the gap in financial literacy, hosting workshops and programs that focus on finance, housing, grants, and loans. "The most rewarding part of my job is being able to help my community

achieve the financial freedom they've been seeking," he said. In his role, he's been able to assist many first-time home buyers in purchasing their homes.

Ash's community involvement isn't constrained to a 9-to-5 schedule – as the owner and founder of Ground 0 Visuals, he takes pride in highlighting local business, athletes, and events through the media production they offer. He's also part of the Customer Experience Committee at ERIEBANK and is a board member of Future Focused Academy, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering young adults aged 18 to 22 with essential life skills, financial literacy, and career-readiness training.

Outside of work, you can often find Ash working on a project, creating content, and keeping up with his four boys. The former Gannon University defensive back can also be found on the football field, helping his father run the Metro Youth Football league – another example of just how committed he is to those in his community. "I've always taken it as a duty to make my city proud," he said. "Erie owes me nothing, but I owe Erie everything." – AK

#### **Britty Lea, 32**

Owner, Dreamlords Entertainment LLC and Livaelore Events LLC // Operations and Events Manager, Ember + Forge

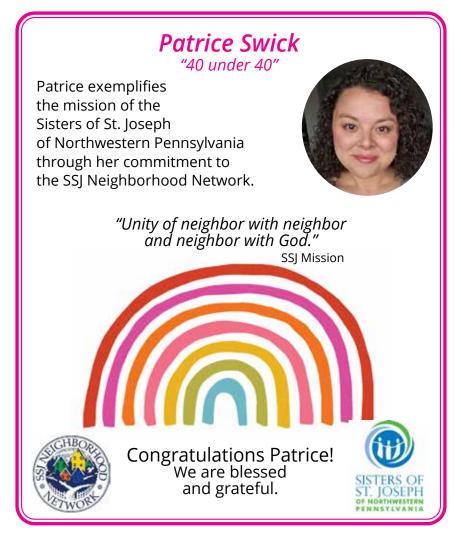
Britty Lea describes herself as a part-time barista and a full-time entertainer. Growing up in Erie, Lea attended Cyber Charter School and went on to re-



ceive a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film and Television from Savannah College of Art and Design. In 2022, she received the Erie Arts and Culture Emerging Artist Fellowship.

Her passion for the arts and entertainment is reflected in the events she has organized, including the inaugural 2024 Gem City Renaissance Festival and three live entertainment comedy shows since 2024 including *The Fishbowl: An Improvised Comedy Show* and *Pasta Down: a Live Pasta Competition Show.* 

Lea also gives it her all as a barista at Ember + Forge. She has been an employee since the coffee shop opened in 2017 and organizes the Erie Latte Art competition every year. "I highly enjoy being able to interact with the community on a daily basis and





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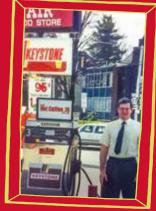


**JUYLA POLASKI** on being selected for Erie's 40 Under 40, Class of 2025!









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my time there has allowed my passions to flourish," she says.

She hopes to make the Erie community better with entertaining events. "Erie has grown tremendously in just a short period of time and my hope is that I've contributed to making Erie a better place by providing just a small amount of laughter and fun. I want to be able to inspire everyone to find the pockets of whimsy in their lives!"

In her personal life, Lea plays tabletop role-playing games, makes costumes, reads, and spends time with her two cats, Fish and Chips. – AS

Rachel Loper, 29 Associate Attorney, MacDonald, Illig, Jones & Britton



Rachel Loper currently has her hands full - she's expecting her first child with her husband this month, while holding down an associate attorney position at one of Erie's most recognizable law firms, MacDonald, Illig, Jones & Britton, in their Banking, Real Estate, and Business Transactions Practice Groups. That means that in addition to growing an actual human, she is also actively contributing to the economic growth of our area. "I strive to make Erie a better place by helping individuals, families, and small businesses build stable foundations and grow with confidence," she said. "Whether it's guiding a first-time homebuyer through a closing, assisting an entrepreneur in launching a new venture, or working with local developers to bring responsible projects to life, I see my role as a partner in progress."

Her nominator, who called her "one of the brightest legal minds that we have in our community," added that she is the driving force behind so much of the work being done in Erie, citing her contributions to countless behind-the-scenes transactions to key, large-scale projects.

The Fairview native, who lives in the same neighborhood she grew up in, is on the board of directors for Early Connections, serves as the vice president for the Young Erie Professionals organization, and is a member of the Erie County Bar Association, having been recently awarded the Pro Bono Award. In her spare time, she and her husband enjoy taking their dog Lucy on walks, enjoying live music at Altered State, and listening to true crime and paranormal podcasts. Loper said she would love to learn more about and explore Erie's haunted buildings. – CS

Ashley Maas, 37
Assistant Director,
expERIEnce Children's Museum



Ashley Maas was at the children's museum so often when her son was a toddler that they offered her a job. "What started as bringing my son to toddler classes turned out to be the beginning of something much bigger. I was a regular at the museum watching the impact play and programs had on kids like my own. Eventually, I was offered a part-time position. I said yes, of course, not knowing it would grow into my full-time dream job," she recalls. Ten years later, Maas is assistant director of the museum and spends her free time cheering on her now 12-year-old son Conner, at the hockey rink or baseball field.

Maas feels that being a part of the museum as a member and later as an employee helped her to see how important play is to learning. "I realized that education is so much more than what happens within the four walls of a classroom. It's in the relationships we build, the confidence we help spark and the way we create a space for kids and families to create, explore, imagine, and play together. That's where real learning happens," she says.

Maas, who calls Erie her "amazing, forever home," has spent her time at the museum working to help it grow into the new and improved version we have now. She focuses on community involvement and accessibility, working with Erie City Schools and the community at large.

She explains, "My goal is pretty simple – to leave Erie better than I found it by helping build a strong community, volunteering where I can, and being part of the energy that's bringing new life to downtown. My best strategy has always been learning from others and I truly believe you don't need a big platform to make a real difference, you just need heart." – EC

#### James Marsh, 31

Field Government Relations Specialist, Erie Insurance

As Erie Insurance navigates the often murky waters of governmental policy, it's essential to have someone like James Marsh to see them through. As the field government relations specialist for the Fortune 500 company, Marsh's first-hand experiences make him exceptionally qualified to do so. In charge of maintaining relationships and communication with state officials and their staff, Marsh also promotes the company's political action committees, and helps monitor legislative happenings that affect the coun-



ty's largest employer.

He detailed that "I'm involved in educating our employees on how our state and federal governments work and how the actions of these governing bodies impact our company and our lives on a daily basis."

Growing up in western New York's Bemus Point, Marsh went on to attend Gannon University, earning his bachelor's degree in political science. He then earned his master's at Hillsdale College.

Following college, he relocated to Falls Church, Virginia, 20 minutes outside Washington, D.C. After working for Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey's successful 2016 reelection campaign, he found himself with the office of Mike Kelly. Promoted twice in under two years, Marsh was the executive assistant and director of administration for the Congressman of Pennsylvania's 16th District – which includes Erie.

After four years, however, Marsh elected to move on from Capitol Hill. While his time with Congress was a highlight of his career, Marsh explained that "moving back to western Pennsylvania was the best choice for my family. To that end, I chose to take a step back from public service and start a career in the private sector."

From there, he quickly climbed to the post of federal government affairs specialist at Valero Energy Corp. The San Antonio, Texas-based fuels producer is one of the largest oil companies in the world, with over 10,000 employees and its 2024 revenue totaling nearly \$130 billion.

Marsh was happy to come back to Erie for a similar role at Erie Insurance. Now a Girard resident, he's an avid churchgoer, chess player, and advocate for diabetes awareness who loves spending time with his wife and their son. Invested in his community, Marsh is ready and "very proud to have been hired by a company that cares a lot about Erie and makes it a better place to live and work." – NW

#### Charlie McDonough, 37

Head Brewer, Lavery Brewing Company

Lavery Brewing Company has become a favorite spot for locals and visitors alike, and it's often been said that their head brewer Charlie McDonough is single-handedly elevating the Erie beer scene. He makes the beers that critics rave about, overseeing all brewing operations for Lavery Brewing Company including the production schedule, inventory management, ingredient sourcing, concept and creative execution, development, production, processing and packaging of the beer, quality control, staff educa-



tion, and social media content. All that and he still manages to make it home in time to watch *Jeopardy!* most nights.

Originally from East Brunswick, New Jersey, McDonough attended East Brunswick High School before moving on to earn his bachelor's and Master of Business Administration degrees from Philadelphia University. He's an active member and supporter of the Brewers Association, Master Brewers Association of the Americas, and Lake Erie Ale Trail. He's a Certified Cicerone and has even judged a few home brew competitions.

"I strive to consistently bring fresh ideas and execute a high-quality product that keeps our community engaged and excited. I want Erie to stand with the beer scenes of other neighboring cities, and give enthusiasts from the greater area another reason to come and experience all that Erie has to offer," said McDonough. He works to foster a culture of education and collaboration and says that personally engaging with the customers and community is one of the most rewarding parts of the process.

Outside of the brewpub, you'll find him with his girlfriend Colleen, hitting the hiking trails and finding nearby breweries and wineries to visit. "We also enjoy taking longer camping trips, always trying to upgrade and perfect our camping set up, and try to hit some creeks for fly fishing. We've recently taken up bowling, and generally like to get out and enjoy the great things Erie has to offer especially in the warmer months," said McDonough.

If you happen to catch him sipping on something at home, it would most likely be a glass of red wine while hanging out with his cat, Magnus. – AVS

Brandon J. Mendoza, 39
President.

Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership



Brandon Mendoza *chose* Erie and his goal is to help "Erie to be the most vibrant Great Lakes city."

Hailing from Brooklyn, New York, Mendoza's path has brought him into a significant leadership role in Erie as he embraces the challenges that come with his position as president of the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership – his experiences have aligned to lead him to this point.

After earning his bachelor's degree from Lock Haven University and going on to earn a Master of Public Administration from the University of Pittsburgh, Mendoza has held a multitude of impactful leadership positions like leading the Public and Government Affairs division of the Master Builders' Association, which serves as "the voice of construction" in western Pennsylvania. He was the executive director of NAIOP Pittsburgh, "the local chapter of the national association that represents the interests of developers and owners of industrial, office, mixed-use, and related commercial real estate" where he increased membership by 40 percent and revenue by 50 percent. Additionally, he served as the government affairs manager for the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce.

Throughout his career, Mendoza has secured millions in sponsorships and brought billion-dollar contracts to Western Pennsylvania. He was named NAIOP Corporate Executive Director of the Year in 2020, was listed among the Pittsburgh Power 100 in both 2022 and 2023 (which is compiled by the *Pittsburgh Business Times*), and in 2017, he was selected by *The Incline* as a "rising political leader shaping Pittsburgh's tomorrow."

And now we get to have him here, doing his impactful work in Erie.

When he's not busy shaping the economic landscape of northwestern Pennsylvania, Mendoza enjoys skating around the hockey rink or tossing the ball around on the football field with his kids Miguel and Isaiah, or hitting the links to unwind. – EP

**PJ Monella, 32**Chief of Staff,
Office of Representative Ryan A. Bizzarro



Moving our community forward together is going to take perseverance and PJ Monella is certainly up to the task. As the chief of staff for the office of Representative Ryan A. Bizzarro, Monella represents the busiest office in the PA legislature. Monella and their team closed over 35,000 cases and assisted constituents in 64 of the state's 67 counties in the last session.

Originally from Clearfield County, Pennsylvania, Monella attended West Branch Area High School and earned his bachelor's degree at Pennsylvania State University. He has a master of professional studies degree from George Washington University. Monella is also a Pennsylvania Notary Public, a member of the Pennsylvania Minor Judiciary Education Board, certified to serve as Magisterial District Judge; and Realtor® Certified Executive (RCE) with the National Association Realtors®.

Monella found his way to Erie serving as CEO of the Greater Erie Board of Realtors – at that time, he was the youngest real estate association head in the country. Prior to that, he worked for three years as a government affairs director for the Pennsylvania Association of Realtors. In his current role, Monella is a problem solver, cutting red tape in state government and delivering tax dollars back to Erie. He is active around the city through his community service to St. Patrick Roman Catholic Church, Polish Falcons, La Nuova Aurora Society, Erie Elks Lodge, and United Professional and Businessmen's Association.

Outside of work you'll find him traveling with his wife and bonus daughters, cooking, reading and writing, and spending time with family and friends. Next time you see Monella, ask him about his time as a radio announcer and disc jockey for former radio station, WPHB 1260 AM in Philipsburg. "My on-air personality was 'PJ the DJ." On Saturdays, I was a wedding disc-jockey," said Monella.

"Erie is already a wonderful place to call home. I am inspired to connect people in our community with the resources to solve their issues with the government – local, state, and federal. We should all be so motivated to continue making Erie the best place to work, play, and live," said Monella. – AVS

#### Sarah Morrison, 30

Director of Marketing and Public Relations, Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority (EMTA)



Sarah Morrison's nominators called her alternately "the personification of rise and grind," and "a driving force," and from her interview, it's clear that this Cranesville native, who attended Slippery Rock University but eventually made her way back to Erie, is all about pushing forward. Morrison, who currently serves as the director of marketing and public relations for the EMTA, is proud of all that she's accomplished thus far, including "leaps in community outreach," and her first big event, 14th Fest.

"I have been lucky enough to work under leadership that trusts me to plan, manage, and execute all areas of marketing and public relations for my or-



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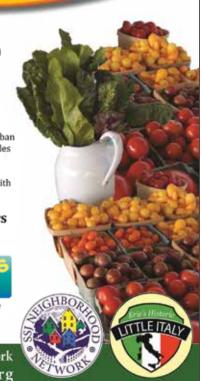


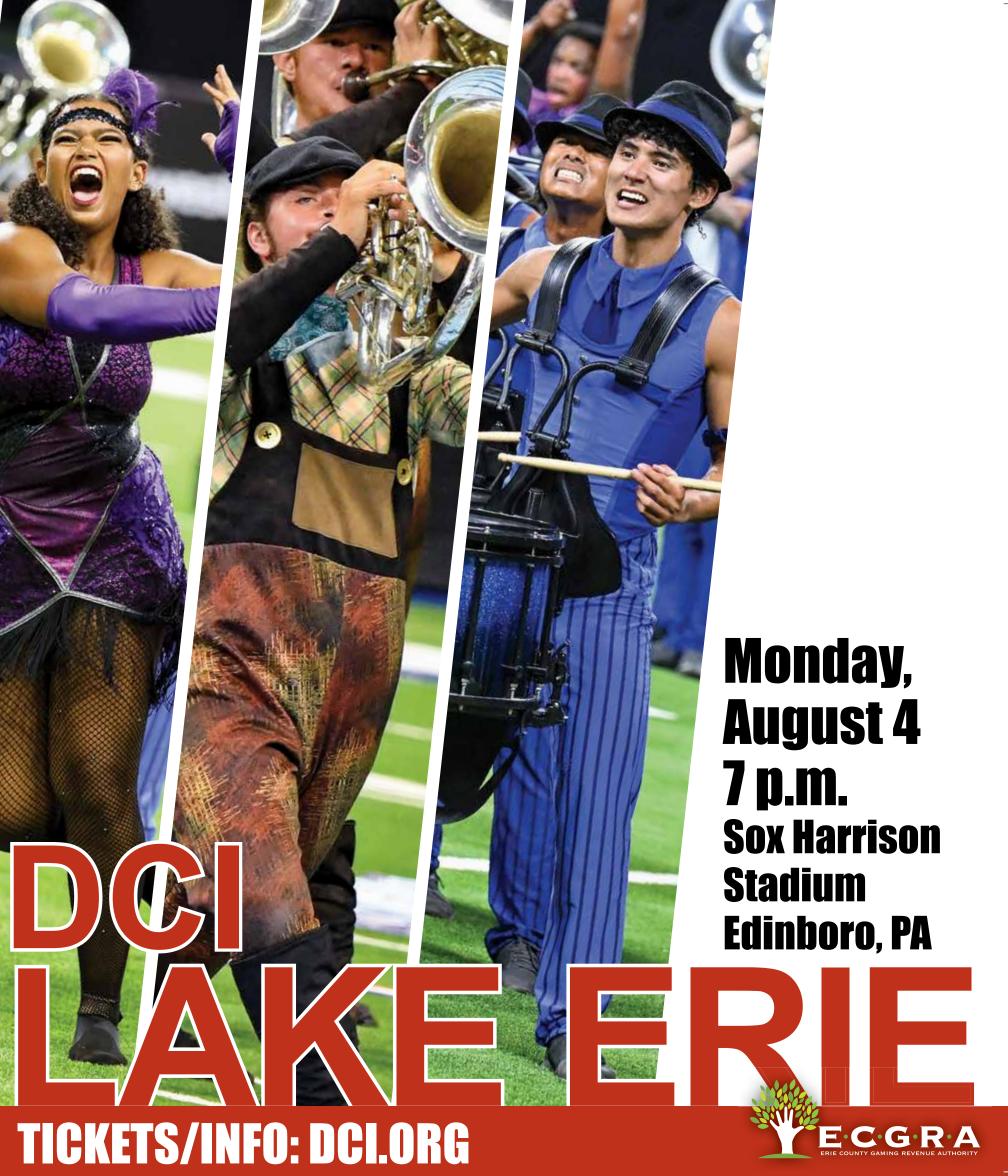




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ganization," she said. However, this might not have been the trajectory of her life, but for a dramatic career change in 2022. Previous to her role at EMTA, Morrison was actually in the craft beer industry.

"I worked as a territory manager for a regional brewery and loved every second of it, but knew my skills could be used in a more rewarding and impactful field," she explained. "I made the switch back into the quasi-government industry, and it has been a whirlwind." She added that she loves what she does now, but still dabbles in the craft beer world.

Outside of work, Morrison enjoys reading, volley-ball, hunting and fishing, and hosting friends and family in her newly purchased home, but she is also a strong advocate for New Americans, as well as our four-legged friends, through her volunteer work with HappyBark.

"I have always believed there are idea people, and doers," she said. "I think Erie is in a place where we have the right balance of both to make strides into a better tomorrow." – CS

Jenessa Norton, 30
Financial and Business Consultant,
Green Nest Consultants



Money talks, and if Jenessa Norton is at the helm, you're bound to feel like a million bucks. As a financial adviser, she uses her passion for investment to give small business owners the tools they need to be successful and sustainable. She is the board president for Erie's Black Wall Street and is a business adviser of the New Wall Street Ventures program, ensuring small business owners can fiscally plan and grow their businesses in the Erie community. She has a bachelor's degree in finance from Mercyhurst University and is contracted through several organizations including the Erie Downtown Development Corporation, USA Credit Builders, Paramount Pursuits Open for Business program, and the Cornerstone Community Land Trust.

She opened her own consulting firm, Green Nest Consultants, in 2021 to help business owners survive the pandemic turmoil. Her company has won awards for Best Business and Professional Services in Erie and Best Credit and Financial Services in Erie.

"Awards are fun, but nothing compares to walking into your local coffee shop, gym, restaurant, boutique, child care center, bakery, etc. and knowing that you had a hand in building this," she said.

Her dream is to help fulfill the dreams of others

and that keeps her going through countless hours of financial projections, business taxes, and reviewing legal contracts for her clients. Her dedication to community pours into her personal life, as her family of four has securely placed their roots here in Erie. When she's not working, you can find her shopping or eating local and enjoying the great outdoors here on the Great Lakes.

"She uplifts underserved communities by providing access to capital and business development support while advancing affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization," said nominator Camille Crenshaw. "Her time, finances, and wisdom are consistently poured back into Erie, showing her deep and abiding love for this city." – CF

**Autumn Nicole Parker, 31**Special Education Teacher, Erie's Public Schools



Born and raised in Erie, Autumn Nicole Parker has dedicated her career to lifting up marginalized and underserved communities in our area. As a Special Education Teacher with Erie's Public Schools, she works with middle school students with a range of learning, mental, emotional, and physical disabilities. Following her high school career at Collegiate Academy, Parker went on to receive a Bachelor of Science in Communications from Allegheny College and a master's in higher education leadership from Baldwin Wallace University.

Her awards (which include the Ubuntu Award from City Year Cleveland and the Leaving A Legacy and Social Justice awards from Allegheny College) reflect her passion for civic leadership and social justice.

Along with her career in special education, Parker also serves on the Burleigh Legacy Alliance Board of Directors and is a racial justice policy implementation partner. She is also the Co-Founder of ERIWE, an organization with the goal of addressing the impacts of redlining and racism in Erie.

"At the heart of my work in, with, and for Erie, I simply aspire to remind our city that it's not the formal, fancy titles, or those who are put on pedestals that drove and will continue to drive real progress here," Parker says. "A title is never needed for that human work, just a contrite spirit willing to learn and apply that learning for the betterment of self and service to others."

Outside of her commitment to Erie and her alma

maters, Parker enjoys calling her mom and friends, going to the Black Feminist Book Club, attending Jefferson Educational Society lectures and events, and watching *Housewives of Atlanta* and *Married at First Sight*. – AS

#### Julya Polaski, 27

Music/Chorus Teacher and Musical Director, James W. Parker Middle School



For Julya Polaski, music is more than just an extracurricular activity. "Music saves lives," she states. "It improves grades in all disciplines and is woven into the fabric of humanity – I truly value having equitable music education in all schools."

Affectionately known as Ms. P to her students, Julya has taken her role in sharing this equity with future generations very seriously. In her two years with Parker Middle School, she has nearly doubled the choral program's participating students and led multiple theatrical productions, most recently *Newsies Jr.*, where over 100 students worked together to make the production a success. In addition to her role as a teacher, Julya is also on the staff for the General McLane marching band alongside her partner, Corey.

After graduating from Collegiate Academy in 2016, Julya moved away to complete her studies and begin a career but found herself drawn back to the area. "Erie really has it all and living away for a while made me realize that," she said on her decision to move back. "Erie has been growing to become a city of arts and culture, and making sure our youth are getting high-quality arts education is crucial in continuing on this trajectory."

Julya's musical talents aren't just reserved for the classroom – since returning to Erie, she's immersed herself in the local music and theater communities through performances in productions with Dramashop, PACA, and the Erie Playhouse, as well as with the Erie Philharmonic Chorus and Chamber Choir. Her upcoming endeavors include a role in the production of *My Fair Lady* at the Playhouse and the Philharmonic's choral performance in North East's Gibson Park.

When she's not behind the conductor's stand or on stage, Julya enjoys staying active through running, sailing, and paddle boarding, all alongside her dog Sawyer. She also enjoys spending time at local coffee shops and curling up with a good book. – AK

#### **Garrett Raszmann, 31**

Founder/mechanic, Erie Bike Co-op //
Maintenance, Basement Transmissions //
Maintenance, Grounded Print & Paper Shop //
Employee, UPS // Home Health Aide, Voices for
Independence



Anyone who knows Garrett Raszmann, even for only a short while, quickly realizes that his love language is "acts of service." If you're on a bike ride and your seat needs adjusted – Garrett is there with the necessary tool. He's there, at Grounded Print and Paper shop, building light boxes or repairing equipment. At Basement Transmissions, you can find him bustling around, making repairs and lending a hand. Working in the dirt at Wildfield Urban Farm – Garrett is there to lend a hand – never needing to be asked and never looking for credit.

Recently, his greatest act of service is one from which the whole community can benefit. As the project leader at the newly launched Erie Bike Coop, Raszmann is leaning into his passion for cycling while helping to put bikes into the hands of those who need them most. A partnership between the Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network and the nonprofit cycling advocacy group BikeErie (where Raszmann is a board member), the Erie Bike Co-op's main mission is to "empower the Erie community through bicycles by recycling donated bikes, offering accessible repair education, and fostering mutual aid to create opportunities for individual and collective transformation."

In the small amount of free time he has, Raszmann is also an incredibly talented printmaker (you can find samples of his intricate, incredible work on his Instagram @printmakerie) and enjoys spending time with his pup, his friends, making music, or practicing slow meditation.

"I strive to be a good steward in creating community around healthy and constructive outlets," Raszmann shares. "Whether it's bikes, art, or music, it all has a large role in catalyzing ways to co-create and relate to each other's experiences." – EP

#### Hannah Rhodes, 27

Program Director, Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park (LEAF)

Hannah Rhodes is working to get us back to our roots – quite literally. As the program director at LEAF, everything Hannah does revolves around trees, the outdoors, and getting the community to connect back with nature.

Growing up, Hannah always felt an affinity for nature: "I grew up a 'wild child' and have always loved outdoor adventures," she said. After receiving her Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education and Special Education from Gannon, Hannah's current trajectory has made a lot of sense. "I feel like my career path combines the two – I get to design environmental education experiences and work in outdoor spaces, often at the same time."

Hannah's role spans beyond the creation and teaching of these educational programs. As the coordinator for the local effort toward the national ReLeaf initiative, she has coordinated the planting of more than 100 trees on Erie School District campuses this spring alone, just a small part of the ultimate goal of planting 275,000 trees in the greater Erie area.

Hannah also works as the volunteer coordinator for the Erie Farm to School program, an initiative that connects local farms with schools to teach students about food systems and support healthy eating. "Food planted and grown by students goes out to Erie School District families, local food services and organizations, and pay-what-you-can market



stands in the summer," Hannah states. "It's a beautiful system to be a part of."

Even though the school year is over, Hannah's work continues – this summer, she is mentoring a Groundwork Green Team as a partnership between LEAF and Groundwork Erie. Hannah's team will be responsible for managing current orchard and permaculture projects as well as identifying sites for tree planting in the fall as part of an effort to increase tree-canopy coverage in designated Environmental Justice Areas.

Outside of work, Hannah enjoys spending time with her two toddlers visiting local favorites like Werner Books, Presque Isle, the Tom Ridge Center, and Asbury Woods. – AK

#### Chantel Rodriguez, 31

Communication Coordinator, Millcreek Township "Sometimes you have to leave to truly appreciate what a place has to offer," said Chantel Rodriguez, the community coordinator for Millcreek Township and an Erie native who left the city at the age of 18 but eventually found her way back. It seems appropriate that the life of this young professional, who uses "storytelling rooted in empathy and inclusiveness" in her position working for local government,



has been story-worthy in its own right. And perhaps no moment proved that more so than when she was honored with The Nonprofit Partnership Excellence Award for Young Professional of the Year in 2024.

She described it as an honor that truly solidified how vital nonprofit work is in our community, and said, "It opened my eyes to how many of us rely on these services, and being able to reach and connect with so many residents made me feel deeply rooted in Millcreek."

Rodriguez isn't all work and no play, though; she self-describes as a "gamer," and has been so for over 20 years – "I mean everything from *The Sims* to *Call of Duty*, open world adventures to horror thrillers," she enthused, saying that most people don't realize it until she starts breaking down plot twists in *The Last of Us* or ranking every *COD* release.

Despite her interest in fantasy worlds, though, Rodriguez is firmly rooted, according to her nominator, in what it means to serve others for the good of the community. "As a first-gen Latina, a proud Penn State Behrend alumna, and now communications coordinator for Millcreek Township," Rodriguez said she has made it her mission to use storytelling and strategy to strengthen the places we call home. – CS

Chris Rosato Jr., 28
General Manager, ASCEND Erie



Rosato, a native of Stanton, California, graduated from Rancho Alamitos High School before attending Edinboro University of Pennsylvania to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Public Relations. He was then employed as the events and marketing manager for the Erie Sports Commission before his current career: overseeing operations for ASCEND Erie, the city's only indoor rock climbing gym, where he manages 30 employees across six departments and works to cultivate relationships with other lo-



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We are proud to congratulate our associate, Rachel Loper, Esq., on her well-eamed recognition as one of Erie Reader's 40 Under 40 for 2025. Her dedication to the legal profession and commitment to serving the Erie community truly sets her apart. We are thrilled to see her hard work acknowledged and recognized by her peers.

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cal businesses.

He is very active in the community. He was the judge of elections for his polling place for four years. He is treasurer and on the board of directors for the French Creek Curling Club and membership committee chair for Young Erie Professionals. He officiates high school baseball and football and is a freelance public address announcer – you may have heard his "big voice" at Erie SeaWolves games and Mercyhurst University sporting events. Simply put, Rosato enjoys filling his calendar with side gigs that are all about having fun. This also includes his spare time, where he plays board games (he owns over 50), cooks, and also enjoys rock climbing, kayaking, and other outdoor activities with his partners and their Scottish terrier Murphy.

"I'm incredibly proud to have helped open Erie's first indoor rock climbing gym and all that came with that, fostering a culture that has led to almost no staff turnover while providing a space where every customer who walks through the doors feels like they belong and has a great experience," Rosato says.

He doesn't just talk the talk. He also walks the walk. In 2024, when Erie Pride Fest was canceled due to the weather, he sprung into action and helped organize a downtown vendor fair. "It was so rewarding to help queer-affiliated businesses salvage their weekend and help the queer community show that even Mother Nature can't cancel Pride," he reflects.

"I have definitely benefited from some amount of privilege in my life and I've always been focused on ways to give back and lift others up," he adds. "There have been very few rooms that I've walked into and felt like I didn't belong, but too many people have the opposite experience. I'm proud of the work I've done to help cultivate pockets of belonging where people see themselves and feel welcome – whether that's on a playing field, in a curling club, or on a climbing wall." – JB

**Dave Schroeder, 38**Technical Director, Performing Artists Collective Alliance (PACA)



If you've ever seen a show at PACA, then you've likely seen the work of McDowell High School and Erie Business Center graduate Dave Schroeder. As technical director for the collective, Schroeder is responsible for the lighting and sound of theater and musical performances (and he's also designed many

show posters over the years too).

In 2020, during the midst of the COVID-19 shutdown, Schroeder began producing the PACA [LiVE!] Concert Series livestreams to help give local musicians a way to continue performing for audiences. He handled, with help from Erie's Lone Sav (40 Under 40 Class of 2024), every aspect of production including the multi-camera video livestream, in-house sound, marketing, and post-production editing. The following year, he received the Leadership Award in Erie Arts and Culture's Community Appreciation Awards.

In his spare time, he is a passionate supporter of the local theater, music, and arts scenes. He also enjoys photography and operates Digg It Dave Photography. He spent a month photographing New York City and curated a photo exhibition at City Gallery. Sometimes he gets on stage too. When he joined his first band as a drummer, he didn't yet play the drums – and only had six weeks to prepare for his first public show.

Now, Schroeder is the drummer for the Erie band Bummer Country alongside Jennifer Meyer, McKenzie Sprague (40 Under 40 Class of 2025), Brent Knight, and Dave Tamulonis (40 Under 40 Class of 2022). Since 2009, he's been thankful to perform gigs with these local musicians and others, including Matt Boland, Liss Victory, Rodger Montgomery, Matt Texter, and Stephen Trohoske and cites his local drum influences as Rick Lopez, Ricky Hopkins, Ken "Stix" Thompson, Bradley Amidon, Ian Maciak, Mike Russell, and Jim "Chunk" Watkins.

To those who know him, Schroeder is described as "an unsung hero" who humbly "does so much for the arts community" without seeking praise or recognition. "He is always trying to show the beautiful and creative parts of our community in Erie," says friend and fellow musician Jennifer Meyer. – JB

#### Katie Spangenberg, 30

Owner, Bean & Bear Cafe

Business owner, marching band assistant director, jazz musician, tennis player, avid putt-putter, former Global Education Office director, director of the Highland Games, world traveler in her own right, and someone who knows (but doesn't dance) *Riverdance* choreography in its entirety – Katie Spangenberg has worn, and continues to wear, a lot of hats and she just turned 30.

Spangenberg's main gig these days is as owner of Edinboro's Bean & Bear Cafe (222 W. Plum St.) and she has strong ties to the Edinboro community and a family history of food service in that community. "I grew up always wanting to own a business. My dad has been in food service his entire career and was a huge inspiration for me and my love of food. I wanted to create a space in Edinboro where people could enjoy good coffee, freshly made food, and have a place where they could feel at home and not feel rushed out for taking up a table," she says.

Spangenberg uses local business products in her cafe and often uses the space to host fundraisers for local needs and charities. "Erie has so many



great things to offer. I want to do my part to help keep the music and arts integral to Erie by helping give students experiences that they will take with them. In addition, creating events and destinations for visitors so they keep coming back," she adds.

In her free time, Spangenberg likes to spend time with her husband Jason (40 Under 40 Class of 2024), their cat Muenster, and her extended family too. But, of all the hats she wears, she seems to really be enjoying her current role as business owner best, "It is so great to see college students using our space to study, high schoolers using it to meet up with friends, or for a first date! I love being a part of the Edinboro community and providing that space." – EC

Mckenzie Sprague, 28
Musician/Artist // Grower/Owner, Poncho's
Greenhouse



Mckenzie Sprague is in a near-constant state of creation and growing – from music to art to plants, she's never far from something she's helped nurture into existence and shared with her community.

Growing up in Fairview, Mckenzie has always been drawn to the outdoors. "I try to spend all of my time outside when the weather is above 30 degrees, otherwise I go stir crazy," she said. "I spend most of my summer outside gardening and doing yardwork at one of the various properties I help maintain, and getting ready for our annual Cabin Jam Fest."

Sharing her love of nature through the business she started, Poncho's Greenhouse in Cambridge Springs, is something Mckenzie is most proud of: "It has been challenging but extremely rewarding," she states. "I love not only connecting with the community by selling vegetable and flower seedlings, but also being a source that gives them the ability to experiment and grow their own food."

You may also recognize Mckenzie from her prolific contributions to the local music and art over the years. She plays or has played with a multitude of groups and currently performs with Steely Mac, Bummer Country, and This American Song. She also performs as a solo artist (Optimistic Apocalypse), most recently recording and releasing her album Above the Land. She's also had her art shown locally, at locations including City Gallery.

For Mckenzie, showing up for both the music and art scenes in Erie is something she will always do: "I know how much it means to me when someone shows up to a show, so I always try to support my friends," she said. "I know people often want to move to other cities where there may be a larger art or music scene, but how would our lovely little scene grow if we all left?"

When she's not growing plants, performing music, and creating art, Mckenzie can be found spending time (likely outdoors) with her boyfriend Brent Knight, her dog, and her 14 chickens. – AK

#### Amber Rose Stilwell, 35

Coastal Outreach Specialist, Pennsylvania Sea Grant // Coordinator, Penn State Extension Master Watershed Steward Program



As a city on a Great Lake with many waterways, it is paramount that Erie protect these resources. According to her nominator Jenny Tompkins (40 Under 40 Class of 2024), that is Amber Rose Stilwell's specialty. "Amber cares deeply for Erie, and she can be seen all over the county (and Northwestern region) sharing the importance of protecting Lake Erie and the Great Lakes," Tompkins shared.

A Pennsylvania native, Stilwell grew up in Ridgeway and went on to obtain a bachelor's in biology and a post-baccalaureate degree in sustainability from Mercyhurst University. She continued her education at Gannon University and earned a master's degree in environmental engineering.

Her education prepared her for her career as Pennsylvania Sea Grant's coastal outreach specialist. Her responsibilities include planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating regional outreach programs with a focus on healthy ecosystems and watershed restoration. She also addresses aquatic invasive species and water quality in Lake Erie and Ohio River watersheds. Her other job as Penn State

Extension's master watershed steward coordinator includes invasive species outreach, native tree and shrub plantings, water quality monitoring, and coordination with local watershed associations. "I love connecting with the Erie community through environmental stewardship," says Stilwell.

Outside of her career, she still finds time to volunteer and work to keep Erie's watersheds healthy. She is the sitting chair of the Pennsylvania Lake Erie Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force and the Aquatic Invasive Species Education and Outreach Committee and often volunteers with her fellow master watershed stewards.

Stilwell also led a program team of Pennsylvania Sea Grant and Penn State Extension staff to accomplish a statewide project called the Choose Native Initiative, which won a Bronze Award for Long Publication from the Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals (ANREP). She is very passionate about her work saying, "Every piece of plastic removed from the watershed, every tree planted, every invasive species managed, every harmful algal bloom exposure prevented, and every person I connect to resources matters deeply." – AS

#### Patrice Swick, 32

Neighborhood Engagement Specialist, Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network

Simple living, community, social justice, and spirituality are at the core of all Patrice Swick does. She developed these specific values while living and volunteering in an intentional community in Tanzania, but she brings them into her daily life and work in Erie as the Neighborhood Engagement Specialist for the Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) and into a multitude of her other volunteer boards and projects.

Swick was born, raised, and homeschooled in Erie before she attended and graduated from Gannon University, studying business administration and theology, and eventually earning her master's degree in public administration. While at Gannon, her extracurriculars were met with the same vigor as her studies – she spent her spring breaks participating in Alternative Break Service Trips, traveling to Mississippi to work on tornado relief, to North Carolina for Habitat for Humanity work, and Guatemala and Haiti for other humanitarian service projects.

Here in Erie she lives that same spirit of service through her volunteer work as the vice president of Groundwork Erie (a local environmental justice group), a member of the Erie Spiritual Coalition (working for fair housing in Erie), as a youth mentor with NWPA Family Services, and as a representative on the New American Council for the City of Erie. At the SSJNN, she works tirelessly to "build relationships with neighbors, community leaders, and partner organizations to foster trust, identify local needs, and co-create solutions that strengthen neighborhoods."

When Swick isn't busy with all of the above, she enjoys live music (having recently caught Beyonce's Cowboy Carter Tour and Taylor Swift's Eras Tour),



she is a proud aunt to two nieces and eight nephews, loves playing board games, sitting around a campfire, and stargazing.

At the heart of it all is love – love for her city and love for her neighbors. In her own words, "I aspire to do more than love, I aspire to be Love with a capital L. Erie is the people. Erie is our friends, family, and neighbors. We need to know each other and truly care about the well-being of each other to make Erie a better place." – EP

#### Rie Witherow, 29

Barista, Ember+Forge // Professional Witch and Spiritual Advisor



Death is a topic that many people are afraid of, often seeking to brush over it; but to Rie Witherow, barista at Ember+Forge, professional witch, spiritual advisor, and historian, it's a necessary conversation. That's why they founded Coffee Over Caskets, a project whose goal is to "empower our community and their loved ones to tackle their fears of death through conversation, creation, and honesty," they said. Witherow is also a death worker and a death witch, "which is a means of magic that deals with understanding and empathizing with death, grief, and ancestral trauma."

The proudly biracial Witherow, who is the grandchild of a Filipino immigrant who fled her country to escape a dictatorship, said that unflinchingly facing the taboo and unusual is the first step to better understanding our city and its needs, citing the "comfortable and known circles and means of community organizing and advocacy which only further isolates us."

Witherow, who attended Harborcreek High School, then Edinboro University, also proudly identifies as a theater nerd, doing dramaturgy and design for

# Congratulations, SARAH!



EMTA is proud to congratulate our own Sarah Morrison as one of the youngest named 40 Under 40 by the Erie Reader!

Sarah, who in many ways has become the voice and face of EMTA, leads our Marketing and PR Department and does a fine job.

But beyond her work at EMTA, Sarah shares her energy and expertise with several Erie organizations as a board member, volunteer, and supporter. Sarah knows what it takes to be a leader within our beautiful community.

We have no doubt that Sarah has much more to give to the Erie community and we are excited by the many ways she will bring impact to our community in the years ahead.

As a paramount public service to the Erie community, I am beyond blessed to have such a strong administration at EMTA with Sarah being a huge part of our success.

Congratulations Sarah! We are so proud of you and enjoy your well-deserved award!

Jeremy Peterson, CEO, EMTA 40 under 40 alumni 2020



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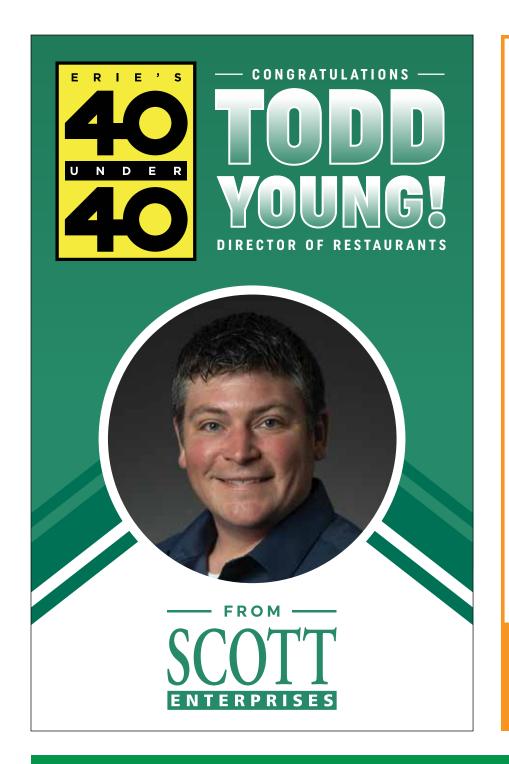
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theater productions; they are also a massive horror movie fan and have been described as a fashion icon and advocate for queer rights.

But their desire to help others in multi-faceted ways came to a head during the Thanksgiving snowstorm in 2024. Witherow spearheaded the See You Next Tuesday Mutual Aid Group on Facebook, which proved crucial to providing recovery aid to Erie neighbors in need. She also organized, with the help of the Erie Downtown Partnership, a water drive to deliver cooling hydration to Erie's unhoused neighbors during our most recent heat wave.

As one of their nominators said, they show up every day and remind others that true community and trust building are the only solutions to oppression. – CS

## **Bethany Woods, 36**Director of Academic Community Engagement, Mercyhurst University



The motto of Mercyhurst University (MU) is famously "Carpe Diem," meaning "Seize the Day," and Bethany Woods truly lives that motto and encourages others to embrace the sentiment.

"Universities are powerful entities in their communities, and my role at Mercyhurst means that I have the privilege of developing and sustaining many of the relationships we have in the Erie community," Woods shares. "I also have the honor of introducing opportunities for our MU community to engage with our neighbors. I aspire to make Erie a better place by encouraging all those who enter our gates to see the beauty in our community through the lens of service."

Service has always been at the heart of it for Woods. Starting out after graduation from the very university where she is now employed, Woods served as a Lake Effect Leader with the AmeriCorps VISTA program where she worked to bring the service learning office into the digital age and to initiate a food recovery program. In her current work at the university, she coordinates the Beyond the Gates program - which connects students with service opportunities at local nonprofits - to date students have given 35,000 hours of service in the community, under her guidance. She also organizes campus-wide volunteer projects like the First Year Day of Service and the Spring Day of Service, and she established the Mercy Market which gives students in need access to a food pantry, clothing, school supplies, as well as a laptop lending library.

On top of all of this, she is a board member with St. Patrick's Haven homeless shelter and the Mercy Hilltop Center. She also enjoys playing volleyball with her husband Josh, reading Romantasy novels, touring wine country with friends, enjoying her stepsons, or whipping up a batch of her famous buckeye balls.

Woods loves Erie and plans to stick around for the long haul. She feels passionate about the community and inspired by the work of the students she leads. – EP

# **Todd Young, 39**Director of the Restaurant Division, Scott Enterprises



From dishwasher to general manager, Todd Young understands hard work and dedication. He started his career in hospitality with Scott Enterprises scrubbing pots at the Meadville Applebee's and is now the director of their entire restaurants division. He has overseen operations for the 11 restaurants Scott Enterprises owns and helped open Oliver's Rooftop and Beer Garden. Joining the team as executive general manager in 2021, he was tasked with menu development, staffing, and restaurant efficiency, all while creating a memorable experience for each guest.

Whether it's a date night at Roma's Italian Kitchen or having a night on the town at Oliver's Beer Garden, he's likely had a hand in the perfect customer experience. His leadership is team-focused, assisting in the kitchen, supporting front-of-house operations, and designing an exceptional dining experience.

"His hands-on approach and selfless dedication set him apart as a role model in the industry," said nominator Maddie Miller. "Todd Young is an inspiration, proving that anything is possible through hard work, resilience, and passion."

Marking his milestone 20th anniversary with Scott Enterprises this year, he looks forward to many more anniversaries, birthday parties, and first dates, bringing the community together for life's cherished moments while fostering growth in Erie's workforce.

He attends New Beginnings Church of God in Meadville and is an avid outdoorsman, hunting, fishing, and boating with his wife and children, and is a member of the Black Ash Sportsman's Club in Crawford County. With two daughters who participate in track and field, soccer, and dance, he also supports youth athletics and arts, spending most of his spare time dedicated to his family. – CF





#### **Bust a Move Downtown This Summer**

Mid Day Dance Breaks continue their more than decade-long stretch

#### CONTINUING THURSDAY, JUL. 3

What better way to break up the day and put an extra skip in your step than with the Mid Day Dance Breaks hosted by local artist Jennifer Dennehy (40 Under 40 Class of 2018)?

Now in its 12th year, Dennehy created this project with the intent for the community to enjoy and participate in dance.

"You can accidentally stumble upon music but you can't as easily stumble upon dance, and so my goal is to make my art form of dance a little less elitist," said the local hoop dancer, teacher, and owner of Kinetic Creativity, Enabling Dance for All. "It doesn't cost anything and it brings the community together around it."

Partnering with the City of Erie Parks and Recreation Department as well as the Crime Victim Center (CVC) to bring this event to life, Dennehy selects different dancers and visual artists for a unique lineup each week.

Past features have included break dancers, hoop dancers, Erie African Dancers, Nepalese dancers, and Indian dancers. Visual artists create alongside the troupes each week and then in September, during Gallery Night, individuals can view and purchase those pieces. Half of the proceeds from the sale of the art will go to the CVC, and



Take your lunch break outdoors this summer and shake off those mid-day blues with a dance break. Local artist Jennifer Dennehy partnered with the City of Erie Parks and Recreation Department as well as the Crime Victim Center to bring the event to Perry Square.

half to the individual artists.

Dennehy emphasizes that "the event is for all walks of life to enjoy. Some are as young as daycare-aged and come with a group every week, some are people who work at the courthouse or Erie Insurance, or unhoused individuals, so that's one of the things I love about these events and why I think they are so special."

Come to watch, come to partake, come with lunch, or stroll down on lunch break – a unifying and creative experience awaits, providing an inspiring and joyful break. – Gretchen Gallagher Durney

Every Thursday through July // Noon to 1 p.m. // Perry Square, 601 State St. // Free // For more info visit: kineticcreativity.dance

#### **Land Lighthouse Tours Light The Way**

Tower stands as important monuments to Erie's maritime history

#### **CONTINUING MONDAY, JUL. 7**

It's impossible to think of the City of Erie without thinking of the lake. People come from all over the region to enjoy summers at Presque Isle – whether it's fishing, enjoying the beach, or hiking the paths at the park. Erie is home to three lighthouses that are culturally significant: one at Presque Isle State Park, one on the channel referred to as the North Pier light (no interior tours), and the Erie Land Lighthouse, which was the first lighthouse lit on the Great Lakes, and has resided at the foot of Lighthouse Street since 1857, often overlooked.

The executive director of Presque Isle Light Station, Averie Shaughnessy-Comfort said, "The (Land Lighthouse) site symbolizes so much of Erie's history as a city – its growth as a harbor and commercial hub, connection to major cities, and connections to the people and places that surround the area."

For those who want to explore more of our maritime history, Land Lighthouse tower tours are available during their regular seasonal operating hours, with combination passes including the Presque Isle Light Station available. Tower tours of the Land Lighthouse are free on "Tower Tuesdays" (which is the



Be sure to put "Climbing Erie's often forgotten Land Lighthouse" on your summer bucket list. The folks at the lighthouse make checking that off super easy, with free access on Tower Tuesdays (the first Tuesday of the month) and Second Saturdays.

first Tuesday of the month) and on "Second Saturdays" of the month. Shaughnessy-Comfort hopes that people take the opportunity to enjoy our national historic treasure: "Whether you admire its beauty, revel in its history, or simply climb to the top for a spectacular view – I hope people take that experience to heart." – Larry Wheaton

The Land Lighthouse is open Fridays through Mondays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. // \$6 for general public, free for members (or for everyone on designated free days) // To climb, attendees must be 44" tall // For more info: presqueislelighthouse.org

#### **Erie Philharmonic Hosts Hometown Concerts**

Look for children's activities and summer camps throughout the month

#### **BEGINNING JUL. 10**

The Erie Philharmonic is transporting audiences to the British Isles with the return of their In Your Hometown Concert Series. Traveling across Erie County, the series of free concerts features music curated for the outdoors, including Gustav Holst's *St. Paul's Suite*, Ralph Vaughan-Williams's Tuba Concerto in F Minor, and Felix Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3 in A Minor. Activities in the park will precede each concert.

The concert series' locations include Downtown City Park in Corry, Diamond Park in Meadville, Gibson Park in North East, Pleasant Ridge Park in Fairview and Girard, and Goodell Gardens in Edinboro. Select concerts will feature performances by the Erie Philharmonic's Brass Ensemble under the direction of

Principal Tubist Ken Heinlein. The final concert of the series will be with the Erie Philharmonic Octet featuring the Junior Philharmonic String Quartet and the Philharmonic Chorus Chamber Choir.

In addition to the concerts, the Erie Philharmonic will be hosting two summer events for young musicians. Mini Maestros: A Sound Playground will feature free activities aimed at kids ages 6 to 10, including an instrumental petting zoo, cardio drumming, build-an-instrument, sound wave explorations, relaxation with sound bowls, make a tune, and the conductor's podium. Refreshments will be provided, and families can RSVP for the event on the Philharmonic website. The annual Summer Music Camp will also begin at the end of this month, which helps students continue



The Erie Philharmonic takes the show on the road again this summer with their popular In Your Hometown concerts. Enjoy free music in Downtown City Park in Corry, Diamond Park in Meadville, Gibson Park in North East, Pleasant Ridge Park in Fairview and Girard, and Goodell Gardens in Edinboro.

to develop their music skills learned during the school year. Choral students will need to be entering 3rd through 12th grade, while orchestral students are required to have at least one year of experience on their primary instrument. The combined camp will teach students about performing with an ensemble with age-appropriate techniques alongside elective

classes, music theory, and efficient practice, culminating in a Student Showcase at the end of the week.

– Thomas Taylor

July 10, 12, 16, 21, 24 and Aug. 6 // 7 p.m. // Various locations // Concerts are free // Concert info: eriephil.org // Summer camp is \$125 for the week. For info: eriephil.org/summercamp

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#### **A Fight For Your Rights**

Radium Girls to be performed on PACA's stage

#### **BEGINNING FRIDAY, JUL. 18**

The Performing Arts Collective Alliance (PACA) is proud to present their upcoming dramatic production of *Radium Girls*, an at-times humorous, historical commentary into a time of health and hazard in the United States.

It's the Roaring Twenties, and luminous watches are the latest must-have in fashion. That is, until the women painting them begin to contract a mysterious illness. Grace Fryer, a dial painter, must bring the fight and shed light on the harmful conditions she and her coworkers are working under. But when new obstacles present themselves, will she have what it takes to get the job done?

"A story of women's rights, workers' rights, and capitalism's quest for profits over people is so necessary at this point in history." – Radium Girls Director Char Newport

Director Char Newport is excited to bring this two-act play to the PACA stage. Although she has worked closely with PACA since 2019, this show will mark her directorial debut.

She has enjoyed watching the actors grow into their roles and learn about the historical significance of the characters they are portraying: "The majority of the characters in the show were real people. It is absolutely crucial to know who they were as people and show them the respect they deserve."



Telling the story of the women working as watch dial painters who endured radiation poisoning due to their working conditions, the folks at PACA are set to stage *Radium Girls*, featuring a cast full of newcomers eager to share their version of this historical moment.

Many of the actors in this production will be making their premier performance at PACA, with only two returning talents, Luke Scribner and Michael Jeffries.

"A story of women's rights, workers' rights, and capitalism's quest for profits over people is so necessary at this point in history and I am so proud that we have been able to bring it to life," Newport said.

If Newport could only convey one message to the public through this production, she would set a reminder that, "We have to be willing and able to fight for our right to be safe, secure, and respected."

Due to the gruesome nature of these radium-induced illnesses, *Radium Girls* is not recommended for younger audiences. – Cassandra Gripp

Fridays and Saturdays, July 18 through Aug, 3 at 7:30 p.m. // Thursday, July 24 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Aug. 3 at 2 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$20 // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com

#### **AmeriMasala Returns with Unrivaled Display of Culture**

Everyone has a seat at the table at the multicultural celebration

#### SATURDAY, JUL. 19

The cross-cultural culmination of community that is the AmeriMasala festival is as bright in color as it is in spirit. On July 19, "the most unique parade" will light up the streets of Erie with its 15- to 20-foot-tall puppets, 15-foot-long dragons, stilt walkers, and art crafted by locals. The creations will be accompanied by the jazzy sounds of a New Orleansinspired marching band, the beat of a West African dance and drum ensemble, and the sultry samba of the renowned female Afro-Brazilian ensemble Batala.

Local chefs will be whipping up cuisines, and organizer Lynn Johnson said this year's festival - the 16th AmeriMasala - will have more diverse food options than ever before with everything from Puerto Rican to Middle Eastern, Mexican, vegan, and more. There will also be more dancers this year with performances of Cambodian, Chinese, and Irish dances, among others. Johnson said whether it's the bands jamming out or the dancers performing, the audience is encouraged to join in and experience a tradition they may not have otherwise.

"That's part of what AmeriMasala is all about," he said. "People cross lines they may not normally cross."

This year's focus is on local involvement as Johnson works with various groups to create a tradition that doesn't entirely rely on outside resources. As part of that effort, the Erie Art Museum will hold creative workshops for children and adults to cre-



Join the diverse, colorful, cultural celebration of the AmeriMasala – featuring large-scale puppets, stilt-walkers, global music and cuisines, dancers, art, and more, all happening in Perry Square.

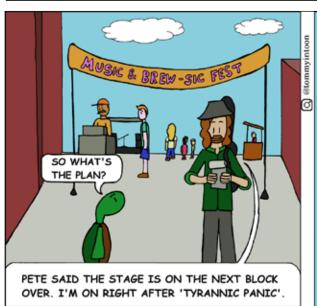
ate puppets, and Johnson recruited more local acts for entertainment.

Johnson calls it a unity event, a "cultural love expression," that looks to replace hate and racism with compassion and respect.

"We're in a curious time here, racially and culturally, it's very dark," he said. "Bad things are happening, and we need to constantly construct things that encourage each other's humanity, enhance each other's empathy."

The event had a 10-year run before 2010 when Johnson took a hiatus; it returned in 2018 and 2019, broke for the pandemic, and has continued from 2022 onward. Normally, the parade goes from 5th and State streets to Perry Square, but with the construction this year, there will be a new starting point TBD but likely near Ember + Forge (on 4th and State). It is family-friendly and all are welcome. – Chloe Forbes

11 a.m. with parade at noon // Perry Square, 601 State St. // Free // For more info: amerimasala.org







#### A Fluid Empathy: FEED Screens Two Locally Animated Shorts

Filmmakers Brad Pattullo and Andrea Russo present their works Viscous and AMYGDALA

#### SUNDAY, JUL. 20

Animation is such a beautiful medium. It can create whole new solar systems filled with a faintly familiar weirdness, or thoughtfully illustrate the mental struggles surrounding everyday tasks. Two of these wildly imaginative and gorgeously constructed examples will be screened and presented by their filmmakers at FEED Media Art Center.

Audiences will get a chance to see two animated shorts – *Viscous* by Brad Pattullo and *AMYGDALA* by Andrea Russo – and hear comments from the artists themselves.

Each film will be screened, then the filmmaker will present a short slideshow presentation, followed by a Q&A session.

Viscous is an aptly-titled story told in stop-motion, with its characters fluidly sculpted in clay. According to Pattullo, the characters are a "sort of slug-like species of semi-liquid alien goo." He described that "you see the entire life cycle of this alien species on a small planet." The blue and red creatures interact, giving viewers a look into their rituals, including death, love, and ultimately, birth.

Pattullo is a longstanding professor with PennWest Edinboro's Animation Department. In addition to many of his own films (and his cartoon series with this publication), he has worked on *Celebrity Deathmatch*, *Gary & Mike*, provided music videos for They Might Be Giants, and been twice commissioned by Sesame Street.

Pattullo's creation began with original storyboards in 2021, with the primary footage shot in 2024. The director was aided in the art, animation, and photography by Taney Basinger, Cameron Howe, Lina Westlund, and Natasha Kravchenko, with sound and score by Adam Lukas.

AMYGDALA is an evocative and affecting expression of how we perceive anxiety and fear. Named for the part of the brain that processes emotions, the film is subtitled "Fear, and everything that comes with it." Russo – who can elsewhere be found as LOcalrat – is a recent PennWest Edinboro graduate. Their thesis film recently premiered at the Dave Weinkauf Film Festival, earning them the George H. Nicholas Memorial Scholarship.

With versatile character design and a warm graphite-like rendering, any look at its comments will show how deeply it resonates with its audiences. In it, we follow our main character as they go about daily life, their stress and worries made manifest while getting dressed, commuting, and interacting with other anthropomorphized peers. The film shows how overstimulation and medication can affect neurodivergence and how important a feeling of peace can be. – Nick Warren



Catch a screening of two locally made animated films this month at FEED Media Art Center: one by the Erie Reader's own Brad Pattullo (pictured) and one by recent PennWest Edinboro graduate Andrea Russo.

2 p.m. // FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State St. // \$10, \$5 Early Bird, Free for Students // Mature Themes and Content // For tickets and more information, go to tickets. eriereader.com



# Butterfly Release 2025



## **SATURDAY, AUGUST 2**

## Music Starts at 12 PM

## **Program to Follow**

Help support terminally ill patients and their families by sponsoring a butterfly in honor of someone you love. Join us for a celebration of life that includes live music and the release of hundreds of butterflies.

Parkside Regency at South Shore

322 Washington Place, Erie



## WingsofHopeErie.org

The Visiting Nurses Association of Erie County is an affiliate of LECOM Health and Allegheny Health Network.

#### Lake Erie Cyclefest Rolls into 2025

Pick a ride (or rides) that suits your skills

#### BEGINNING THURSDAY, JUL. 24

Our area really shines when viewed from the seat of a bicycle. The 2025 Lake Erie Cyclefest returns to offer a vibrant weekend chock full of rides and events that align with every cyclist's skillset, no matter experience or interest level.

Join fellow cycling enthusiasts July 24 through 27 as the Erie Sports Commission teams up with a slew of local organizations, including the Erie Downtown Partnership, to coordinate no less than six self-guided, family-friendly rides showing off Erie County in all its glory, on all four points of the compass.

Dave Tamulonis (40 Under 40 Class of 2022), events and marketing manager for the Erie Downtown Partnership says, "For us, it's really important to showcase Erie's streets as a venue for the Downtown Slow Roll ride to both show off our cycling infrastructure and learn how that infrastructure can be improved and expanded."

The weekend isn't just for Erie residents either, although you'll certainly see them out on rides. Tamulonis continues, "Folks come from all over so getting that fresh outside perspective on our city's needs is a huge part of our public feedback gathering for future development advocacy. It's also great to see locals and out of towners exchange information about Erie and biking."

#### **The Downtown Slow Roll**

Thursday, July 24, 6 p.m.

Cost: Free, registration is required This slow roll continues to set records, with last year's attendance reaching over 400 cyclists. Beginning and ending at Perry Square for riders aged 10 and above, you'll take a leisurely zip through the streets of Erie returning for a Night Market and live performances by local musicians Side-Eye and Eden on Fire. Riders under age 10 can partake in a bike safety course.

#### **Grape Escape Ride**

Friday, July 25

Cost: \$50 by July 22

Lake Erie Wine Country awaits you as you pedal past the storied vineyards along the shores of Lake Erie. Beginning and ending at South Shore



Get ready to roll this summer with the multitude of group rides scheduled during Lake Erie Cyclefest, Whether you're more into a leisurely slow roll, a glide around Presque Isle, or racing through 50 miles of the county - Cyclefest has a ride for you.

Winery, mileage options include a 25-mile or 50-mile trip.

#### **Tour de West County**

Saturday, July 26 Cost: \$50 by July 22

Asbury Woods Nature Center is the hub for this long-running, gorgeous ride. Choose a distance of 12, 25, or 50 miles with an after-ride picnic featuring food and drinks so you can properly refuel.

#### Six Mile Creek Classic

Saturday, July 29, 2 p.m.

Cost: \$40 by July 26

Speed and adrenaline meet in a time trial-style ride along the rugged trails of Harborcreek's Six Mile Creek Park. Helmets are required and multiple competition classes are available from beginner through expert including single speed and even Class 1 E-Bike. Food and drink await your adventure's finish!

#### **Presque Isle Sunrise Ride**

Sunday, July 27, 5:30 a.m. Cost: \$35 by July 25

Perhaps the most beautiful ride on the docket. Peep a stunning sunrise on this 13-mile loop of Presque Isle. Beginning at the Beach 1 Pavilion, pedal through the tranquil nature-filled park. An early tour of the Presque Isle Lighthouse and classic pancake breakfast at the Rotary Pavilion are both included. What a way to start your Sunday!

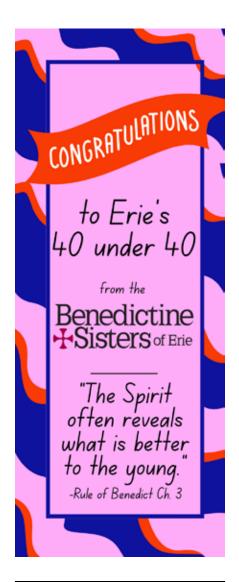
#### See Spot Ride, **Ride for Animal Rescue**

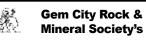
Sunday, July 27 Cost: \$50 by July 25

Choose between 10, 25, or 40mile rides beginning in South Erie County at McKean Elementary School and finishing at Because You Care Adoption Center. A post-ride "Pawty" includes lunch, drinks, music, and a boatload of furry friends available for adoption. A great ride for a great cause.

- Jeff McCullor

For more information on any of the above rides, please visit: eriesportscommission.com/lakeeriecyclefest





#### **56th Annual Gem & Mineral Show & Sale**

July 19 & 20, 2025

#### **Zem Zem Shriners Banquet** and Conference Center

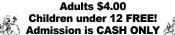
2525 West 38th Street Erie, PA (Corner of West 38th & Zuck Road)

From I-79-NB: Take Exit 180, left onto Interchange Rd., continue onto Zimmerly Rd., turn right onto Zuck Rd. Parking lot is on the right, just past Zuck Park.

From I-90: Take Exit 22B onto I-79 North, then Exit 180, left onto Interchange Rd. Continue onto Zimmerly Rd., turn right onto Zuck Rd. Parking lot is on the right, just past Zuck Park.

#### SATURDAY 10:00AM - 6:00PM **SUNDAY 10:00AM - 5:00PM**

**DEALERS - DOOR PRIZES CRYSTALS - FOSSILS GEODES - JEWELRY - BEADS ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN** 





#### Cats: The Musical at the Erie Playhouse

The purr-fect night out for musical fans

#### **BEGINNING FRIDAY, JUL. 25**

Memory may be all alone in the moonlight, but audiences won't be while enjoying *Cats: The Musical* at the Erie Playhouse.

Andrew Lloyd Webber's wildly successful musical based on T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* tells the story of a group of cats called the Jellicles and the night on which they hold their Jellicle Ball, an event which culminates in the choosing of one cat to ascend to the Heaviside Layer and come back to a new life.

First opening in 1981 in the West End in London and 1982 on Broadway, Cats has seen great success over the years, winning a multitude of awards and holding the honor of fifth-longest-running Broadway show. Further, it has seen two film adaptations in 1998 and 2019.

If the plot itself hasn't hooked you with its odd but interesting premise, let the highly visual nature of the show draw you in, with dance numbers sure to impress from a talented group of performers who have been working together to bring the show to

life.

"It takes time and effort to blend everyone's abilities into a cohesive look," said show director Richard Davis, "but through repetition and the support of our trained dancers, we always find a harmonious middle ground. It's deeply rewarding to see a group of relative strangers transform into a cohesive ensemble and build a strong sense of community."

In addition to staging the musical in July and August, the Erie Playhouse will be holding a special Cats event alongside Purrista Cat Café. On Sunday, July 6 from 1 to 3 p.m., the cafe will host a meetand-greet with cast members from the production and some will be in full makeup and costume for photo opportunities. The entire cast of Purrista cats will be available to visit with as well, for those who are able to make the minimum donation for entry to the cat room. A raffle basket with Purrista and Playhouse items will be up for a chance to win, and Purrista will also be premiering a Cats-themed drink menu which officially begins July 21. – Ally Kutz



The feline-loving folks at the Erie Playhouse are ready to pounce onto the stage to present Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Cats*. Teaming up with the Purrista Cat Cafe, the cast will be slinking into some special events throughout the show's local run.

Fridays and Saturdays, Jul. 25 through Aug. 10 at 7:30 p.m. // Thursday, Aug. 7 at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays, Aug. 3 and 10 at 2 p.m. // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. // \$19-\$30 // For tickets and info: erieplayhouse.org

#### Erie Reader Book Club: July 2025

Tom Lake by Ann Patchett

SUNDAY, JUL. 27

The Erie Reader Book Club will be reading and discussing the novel *Tom Lake* by Ann Patchett in correspondence with the 40 Under 40 Erie Reader issue.

Pinning down a "theme" for the 40 Under 40 issue as it translates to a book club setting is no easy task – with individuals from all walks of life doing vastly different things in our community, there seems to be no truer connection than that of their youth. With all being at such pivotal points in their lives, books that fall into the coming-of-age category are the perfect fit.

Tom Lake by Ann Patchett is exactly that – a mother's coming-of-age story, retold years later to her own children when they are at a pivotal point in their own lives. Set in the spring of 2020, Lara's three daughters return to the family's orchard in Northern Michigan. While out picking cherries, the girls beg Lara to tell them the story of Peter Duke, a now-famous actor with whom Lara once shared a stage and a romance with at a theater company called Tom Lake.

As Lara tells the story of her past, her daughters begin to examine their own lives and their relationship with her mother, as well as reckoning with what they thought they knew about the world as it seems to fall apart around them. Both nostalgic for the past and hopeful for the future, the compelling narrative and insight into familial dynamics within *Tom Lake* creates the perfect coming-of-age story that spans and speaks to generations. – Ally Kutz

1 p.m. // Werner Books and Coffee, 2608 Liberty St. // Free to join, cost of book not included // For more info: werner-books.com

#### Find Your Groove at the Erie Blues & Jazz Fest in Frontier Park

Celebrate over 30 years of regional music and art

#### **BEGINNING SATURDAY, AUG. 2**

Nestled in the lush space of Erie's Frontier Park, the Erie Blues & Jazz Fest is set to celebrate more than 30 years honoring America's musical heritage. This grassroots event has evolved into a summer tradition and is a testament to our region's communal spirit. "For three decades, the festival was synonymous with its founder, John Vanco, who created and sustained it as an extension of the Erie Arts Museum," says Tim Bruno, chair of the festival's board of directors. "John and all of those that helped him throughout the years had a clear purpose: bring together musicians, performers, artists, then place the whole Erie community in their midst, and good things happen. We're continuing that philosophy and adding our unique personality to it."

This year's lineup is dynamic and diverse. Saturday's headliner, The Suffers, brings a high-energy blend of jazz, gospel, and R&B from Houston. Selwyn Birchwood, a rising star known for pushing the boundaries of modern blues, is set to add contemporary flair to the weekend while Lil' Ed & The Blues Imperials are also scheduled to showcase their gritty, electrifying, and irresistible Chicago blues style. On Sunday, genre-bending jazz fusion group Garaj Mahal takes the stage with a set that blends improvisation, funk, and world rhythms into a captivating performance. The fest also features local saxophonist Brent Birckhead and regional acts such as Jeremy Jaeger & the Jive Turkeys and 3 Kings, ensuring a full weekend of horn-driven, soulful sounds.

"We want the audience to experience artists playing authentic blues and jazz genres, but also understand that these genres have heavily influenced contempo-



Erie's summer right of passage, the Blues and Jazz Fest, returns to Frontier Park for two days of music, dancing, local food, crafts, and fun. Included on the bill this year are (clockwise from top left) Selwyn Birchwood, The Suffers, Garaj Mahal, and Brent Birckhead.

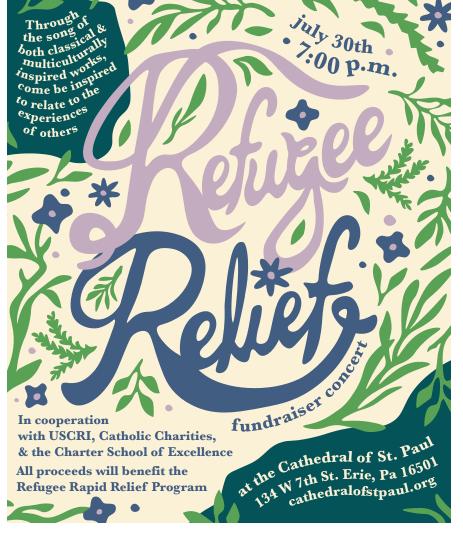
rary music that has the same amazing melodic and improvisational elements in different formats," says Maria Gangemi, festival producer and talent buyer.

Beyond the music, the festival weaves community and conservation into its mission, emphasizing nature education, arts engagement, and regional unity – all without charging an admission fee (although donations are encouraged). "There's a reason people refer to it as The People's Fest," Bruno adds. "Everyone is welcome here and everyone is family." – Aaron Mook

Saturday, Aug. 2 and Sunday, Aug. 3 beginning at noon // 1501 W. 6th St. // \$15 Suggested Donation // For more information, go to eriebluesandjazz.com







## Gem City Style: 40 Under 40 Catch-up

#### A conversation with Brad Triana of Both Studios

By: Jessica Hunter

Stepping into Brad Triana's expansive workshop in Erie's Little Italy, you quickly realize this isn't just a woodshop – it's what he calls a "test kitchen" for creativity. "My life revolves around making objects," he says, and over the past decade, that devotion has earned him a reputation as one of Erie's master craftsmen. His goal? To create a space that's always "conducive to growth and exploration."

Part of Erie's 40 Under 40 class back in 2014, Triana reflects on the whirlwind since: "I had to look back at that issue and kind of see where I was at and really take account of what's happened since then," he muses, scrolling through his camera roll to chronicle the evolution of his craft.

His business Both Studios began humbly in his two-car garage shortly after that 40 Under 40 recognition. "I got my first commission, realized that I like to make really large objects, and my garage was not able to support what I wanted to do," he recalls. Both Studios, he explains, is a "fabrication shop that produces custom furniture by commission," with a mission to "assist both residential and commercial clients in discovering and making heirloom-quality objects," incorporating both wood and metal. Like many things in Erie, a word-of-mouth connection led him to his current space at the Shop at 19th and Chestnut, where he's been crafting for about 10 years, maintaining a "very flexible space to accommodate a wide variety of projects."

Woodworking has always been in Brad's blood, with both his grandfather and father having woodshops in their basements. While they never pursued it professionally, the craft always intrigued him. Growing up as a "big Tim Taylor and Norm Abrams fan," his love of tools runs deep. The pivotal moment to pursue it as a career came at the end of his undergrad work, when a professor encouraged him to forgo teaching and dive into woodworking. His father's adage, "with the right tools, you can make anything," became a guiding principle, shaping his career around the pursuit of those very tools.

Before Both Studios, Brad explored various paths. He tried substitute teaching, worked at a pipe organ factory in town, and even took photos for the Erie Reader. He briefly taught at Edinboro University, covering for his professor. It was during his time at the organ factory that he landed his first commission, solidifying his desire to focus on custom work.

Brad's design aesthetic is best described as "minimalist meets warmth." Rather than describe his work, he prefers to show it. "I'm not really a talker as much as I just like to cut straight to the point," he admits, finding that showing images immediately sparks a conversation. His process often begins with "a rough sketch and allows flexibility in discovering the final product." He loves "letting the materials talk to me and inform the design."

His current inspiration comes from an unexpected



Jessica Hunter caught up with woodworker Brad Triana, 40 Under 40 Class of 2014, at his studio within the Shop at 19th and Chestnut to discuss how his life and work has changed since his 40 Under 40 appearance.

source: bridge building and design. Having recently delved into welding, many of his pieces feature steel bases, and he looks to different bridge designs to "cantilever the tops." This approach helps him "think outside the box" and makes his creations "less chunky, more streamlined." He also emphasizes that "the most interesting and unexpected solutions come about through limited materials." He works to incorporate other elements to complete a thought, finding that "it is through this process that true creativity flourishes." Sometimes, he even makes "scale modes" for clients, finding it "fun to see a large conference table begin sized for a cat and develop into its full-scale form."

Every project, Brad says, presents a creative challenge. A monumental undertaking was a 33-foot picture frame commissioned by the Jefferson Educational Society, built to house (fellow 40 Under 40 alum) Michael Hinman's 30-foot-wide, 7-foot-tall painting, *The Agora*. Having never worked on such a large scale, it taught him that he enjoys "making large scale objects that take weeks or months." More profoundly, it highlighted "the importance of friends and the community in making larger scale projects," as he often needs "an extra set of hands, or, you know, 10 extra sets of hands."

In an increasingly digital world, working with his

hands holds deep meaning for Brad. He sees the rise of "throwaway culture," driven by quick and cheap production, as an opportunity for artisans like himself. He laments how "almost everything around us anymore is either made poorly or intended to fail," but sees opportunity in that for makers like himself: "While that is depressing, it opens up a lot of opportunities for people like me to show clients other, more sustainable ways of making." He believes "people have much more of a connection to things like wood and steel, as opposed to sawdust and glue." He emphasizes, "Fewer objects. Higher quality. Somewhere along the way, we stopped learning how to care for the things we own." Furthermore, "despite how well something is made, nothing is more important than caring for and maintaining the things you have."

Erie, the city and its community, has profoundly shaped his business philosophy. Brad, ever the optimist, focuses on the positive. He's "always honored that people will seek me out to help them solve their design or fabrication ideas, problems, whatever they be." The trust clients place in him to create something for their living or business spaces, something they interact with daily, is a constant source of gratitude. He finds immense reward when clients express a desire for pieces that can be passed down







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through generations. "It's always awesome when they come to me and say, 'you know, I'd like you to make something that I can give to my grandchildren," he shares, emphasizing the deep meaning behind such commissions, especially when clients bring their own materials to incorporate. The power of word-of-mouth in Erie, he admits, is consistently surprising.

So, what's next for Both Studios? Brad is enthusiastically working on a treehouse for his two children. He considers them his "favorite clients" because they "really helped teach me a lot about being aware of your environment, making things safe, stable that can last and hold up to the elements." The treehouse project holds personal significance, connecting to a family tradition – his grandfather, a woodworker, lived in a treehouse as a child, and later built one for Brad and his brothers. Building one for his own children has been a long-held dream.

One of his biggest challenges, he admits, is "finding enough time in the day to do the things I love" and "being torn between spending time with my family and creating." Yet, the "most rewarding times are when the two align," as he loves "spending time in my shop with my children and watching them play with materials and create on their own."

"Almost everything around us anymore is either made poorly or intended to fail. While that is depressing, it opens up a lot of opportunities for people like me to show clients other, more sustainable ways of making." – 2014 40 Under 40 honoree and woodworker Brad Triana on throwaway culture's silver lining

When asked about his personal style, Brad offers a humble, yet profound, perspective. "I don't want people to see me. I want them to see what I made, what I do." He draws a parallel to his passion for drumming, wherein the drummer's contributions to the band (in his case, Fox Grotto) are felt more than seen. For Brad, his life, whether in woodworking or drumming, is "all repetition," a slow, dedicated process of "building a skill up." The core philosophy is simple: "the more time and effort you put it in, the better the end product." And through his enduring work at Both Studios, Brad Triana continues to demonstrate the beautiful outcomes of that dedication.

For more information on Brad Triana and Both Studios, visit bothstudios.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

#### 28 Years Later is a Disappointing Bag of Missed Opportunities

Quality performances and premise sunk by insipid plot



In 2002, Danny Boyle injected some much-needed energy into the zombie subgenre with 28 Days Later, whose rapid-fire editing and almost experimental use of nascent digital cinematography made it look unlike any other movie at the time. Could his much-anticipated sequel 28 Years Later give modern audiences that same jolt of energy?

I'm sad to answer in the negative as the film is a mess of ideas in search of a coherent theme. It is ultimately a fascinating premise that is in service of nothing but setting us up for future sequels.

Nearly three decades after the "Rage Virus" ravaged the countryside, the British Islands have been quarantined from the rest of the world with its inhabitants forced to deal with the infected on their own. On a small island connected to the mainland by a thin strip of land, a group of people have set up a remnant of civilization. But when a young boy (Alfie Williams) heads into the mainland with his mother (Jodie Comer) to find a potential cure for her illness, he encounters infected, survivors, and a world he was not prepared for.

The idea of a post-electric agrarian Britain cut off from a modern world that has moved on without them is endlessly fascinating and it seemed the film would emphasize the boredom and monotony



that would come with such a society (as hinted with the use of Rudyard Kipling's *Boots* in the absolutely brilliant trailer). But it is just a setup to an uninteresting extended chase film that contains a twist so jaw-droppingly stupid, it undermines the rest of the film. The movie is well-acted and well-shot, but it is all for naught with such an abysmal story. – Forest Taylor

Directed by Danny Boyle // Written by Alex Garland // Starring Alfie Williams, Jodie Comer, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Edvin Ryding, Christopher Fulford, Stella Gonet, Jack O'Connell, Chi Lewis-Perry, and Ralph Fiennes // 115 minutes // Sony Pictures // Rated R

#### Lost in Translation: Universal Language is a Funny Bit of Absurdism

Director Matthew Rankin brilliantly blurs audience's perception of place, people



Film is one of the best art forms for connecting audiences with a place and a people, but what happens when the filmmaker intentionally tries to obfuscate those elements? I think that is the case with Matthew Rankin's (*The Twentieth Century*) new film *Universal Language* which is tangentially related to Winnipeg, but in such a fantastical way that it becomes more dream than reality. The film is a deadpan and uproariously funny look at how language and location connect and divide us simultaneously. The result is like all the best elements of Roy Andersson, Aki Kaurismaki, and the films of the Iranian New Wave all mixed together.

It is winter in a city that may be Winnipeg, but may also be Tehran. Negin (Rojina Esmaeili) and Nazgol (Saba Vahedyousefi) find some money frozen in ice on the sidewalk that they think they can use to buy new glasses for a classmate whose old glasses were stolen by a turkey. While trying to free it from the ice, they run into Matthew (Rankin), a government worker who leaves his job to visit his estranged mother. In the middle of these stories is Massoud (Pirouz Nemati), a guide leading confused tourists through the most surreal and pedestrian tour of a city imaginable.

As these stories all converge and coalesce, Rankin emphasizes the absurdity of their situations. Through dry humor, he combines the artifici-



ality of day-to-day life with the authenticity of film. Characters find connection not through place or language (although seemingly set in Canada, most characters speak Farsi) but through the very human drive to find meaning in the meaningless. These kinds of existential questions always work better through comedy, and *Universal Language* is one of the funniest in recent memory.

Universal Language is currently playing in select theaters and is also available on Amazon Prime, Apple TV+, Google Play, and YouTube.

Directed by Matthew Rankin // Written by Rankin, Ila Firouzabadi, and Pirouz Nemati // Starring Rojina Esmaeili, Saba Vahedyousefi, Matthew Rankin, Pirouz Nemati, Mani Soleymanlou, Ila Firouzabadi, Danielle Fichaud, Bahram Nabatian, and Sobhan Javadi // Maison 4:3 // 89 minutes // Unrated



Jossy Peach

Monochrome Studios



The debut EP from Erie recording artist Jossy Peach is much more than an eclectic collection of cover songs. Taken as a whole, it's a clear statement of an artist's intent, identity, and affinity for pop culture. As a matter of fact, it took this listener quite more time than they'd like to admit before they even realized that this was, in fact, an assemblage of covers. The record begins with "Jolly Sailor Bold" a minor-key sea chantey awash with the subtle lapping of waves and murmurs of seagulls. The centuries-old tale was made famous by the fourth *Pirates of the Caribbean* installment. Next up is the somber classic "Gloomy Sunday" from Billie Holiday. It makes you readjust your context, shifting to muted trumpets and a slowly-swinging jazz kit right out of a smoky lounge. "Edge of Night" follows; harmonically similar to the opening track, its ethereal tone and additional vocal tracks make it a loving tribute to Pippin's song from *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King.* Then there's the lnk Spots' "I Don't Want to Set the World On Fire" (featured in the *Fallout* franchise) as cooing minimalist piano ballad. Things fast-forward to the modern classic "Good Luck, Babe!" by Chappell Roan, stripped down to a sparse, impassioned plea from Peach. That same potent feeling is echoed in "I Wanna Dance With Somebody." Peach is a gifted song stylist and musical changeling, able to interpret both certified club bangers and diegetic ditties into her own art. – Nick Warren



#### **Addison Rae**

Addison
Columbia Records



Addison Rae makes a solid case for pop stardom on her self-titled debut. Less than two years ago, the career of TikToker-turned-musician Addison Rae was considered a joke. After her 2023 EP *AR* received a lukewarm response, many dismissed her as another TikTok star with fleeting musical ambitions. However, 2024 signaled a change for the better. Her remix of Charli XCX's "Von Dutch" in March and the release of her single "Diet Pepsi" in August showcased newfound artistic confidence. Said growth worked out in spades as both tracks became popular in the internet space and pop music, garnering mainstream radio play. This momentum built anticipation for *Addison*, the musician's debut album. Created by a braintrust of just three people (Addison Rae, Luka Kloser, and Elvira Anderfjärd), the project separates the musician from her biggest industry co-signs. Addison Rae showcases herself as a genre and cultural butterfly, jumping between eras and soundscapes with ease: The Lana Del Rey inspiration on "Diet Pepsi" pairs tastefully with various homages to Madonna's '90s era on "New York" and "Summer Forever." This melding of styles creates an album that feels both wholly original while still holding reverence for the materials that influenced the sound. By leaning into her musical instincts and defying expectations, Addison Rae has turned skeptics into believers. – Nathaniel Clark



#### James McMurtry

The Black Dog and the Wandering Boy New West Records



By his own doing, James McMurtry's latest album title and backstory rests in the shadow of his celebrated father, yet the mastery of song-writing found on this release is not eclipsed. With a tremendous gift, the younger McMurtry has evolved into the role of mystic. His lyrical characters develop from paper scraps to tell our stories like prophetic tea leaves. He gazes into our minds and souls as easily as a crystal ball. His own lyrical progeny are molded from mud, dope, and memories with McMurtry being both accepting and unforgiving of his disenchanted John and Jane Does. Those familiar with James McMurtry know he unapologetically shares his political views, which wind openly throughout many if not all tracks. McMurtry vocally blends the best of all The Highwaymen (Cash, Jennings, Kristofferson, and Nelson) with rich, smooth hesitation even when sometimes straining just above a whisper. Revisiting producer Don Dixon (R.E.M) maneuvers, throttles, and brakes, which allows McMurtry's longtime band to rumble along with a Texan-bred roadhouse sound, never letting us forget his skill as a life-long guitarist. Notable tracks: "Pinocchio in Vegas," "Sons of the Second Sons," "Sailing Away," and "Laredo (Small Dark Something)." – Melissa Sullivan Shimek



#### Garbage

Let All That We Imagine Be The Light Infectious Music



Popular '90s alternative rock band Garbage celebrates 30 years together with their eighth studio album *Let All That We Imagine Be The Light*. Their mix of electronic sounds with rock instrumentation is similar to Gary Numan, while Shirley Manson's vocals show influences of Patti Smith and Siouxsie Sioux. Garbage has managed to continue sounding fresh without becoming a nostalgia act. The group has carried on over the past few decades while serving a dedicated underground fan base – especially in the LGBTQIA+ community – where songs like "Queer" and "Cherry Lips (Go Baby Go)" are anthems. With their latest release, the focus is on the current state of the world, with the theme of love on the brink of extinction permeating tracks like "There's No Future In Optimism," "Hold," "Radical," and "The Day That I Met God." The darkly grooving "R U Happy Now" holds back no disdain for our current administration. Additional standouts include "Chinese Fire Horse" and "Get Out Of My Face AKA Bad Kitty," surefire bets for future set lists with their driving rhythms and catchy choruses. *Let All That We Imagine Be The Light* shows that Garbage is still as relevant as ever and that they can still create danceable songs while maintaining a message. – Larry Wheaton



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#### From the Basement to the Hall

#### How Basement Transmissions is becoming Centennial Hall

By: Larry Wheaton

ver the years there have been venues that have created a haven for artists and musicians to share their talents with others: whether it's been the Continental Ballroom, the Beer Mug, or Forward Hall, there has always been a place for the Erie outsiders. The latest venue to shut its doors is Basement Transmissions, which started as a physical venue along State Street in 2011, eventually moving to the old Roadhouse Theatre only a few years later. Basement Transmissions hosted many regional and national acts over the years and gave artists a place to hone their crafts with practice spaces and the weekly BT Art Club. However, as the old adage goes, when one door closes, another opens - and with the sale of Basement Transmissions comes the birth of Centennial Hall.

The club was purchased by neighbors and local entrepreneurs Jason and Nikki Lavery (40 Under 40 classes of 2013 and 2016, respectively), who own Lavery Brewing Company. Bob Jensen (40 Under 40 Class of 2014), owner of Basement Transmissions (BT) said, "I've had a blast helping so many people get their start in music and art. I've made a ton of friends and I'm so happy to pass the torch to the Laverys. This was a great deal for us all and I'm very, very excited to see what they are going to do with the space."

Jensen and Jason Lavery have a long history together, as they were both members of the local band Pegasus Unicorn and signed to the early 2000s indie collective label Basement Transmissions, which also featured acts like Black Rose Diary, Telefonics, and The Trashed. Jason may have hung up his bass to focus on opening the brewery in 2009, but Basement Transmissions never really left him. He has a BT tattoo on his arm and has been their neighbor for as long as the venue has been there.

Regarding the transition, Nikki Lavery said, "Jason was a part of BT before it was even a place. We have seen it grow from the beginning, and now we are a part of it again." Jason hopes to keep the mission of BT alive:

"Everybody needs a third place – you go home, you go to work, and go to your third place. Being in the brewing community, I know that breweries tend to be third places for people. So I think this was the third place for the local art community. They could come here and hang out and do art club or go to a show, or be part of a band in the basement. So I think it means a lot to a lot of people. And we hope that we don't disappoint anybody."

The Laverys are no stranger to hosting live events. Outside of their annual St. Patrick's Day performances from The Mulligans, they have dubbed the building behind their brewery as The Bunker, hosting local and national bands in the raw space. Jason told us how they were in the process of seeing what it would take to convert the Bunker into a venue when Basement Transmissions went up for sale: "We were about to pull loans to renovate the Bunker and turn it into an events space and music hall. The price tag was escalating because there was no water, no sewer, and we would have to build everything from scratch." But with serendipitous timing. BT went on the market as a much more feasible option. Beyond practicality, Jason was also compelled by principle: "There is an obligation to keep [it]. When there is a building two doors down in our neighborhood that was a live music venue, rather than see someone buy it and turn it into an office building, or worse tear it down and turn it into a parking lot, you do everything you can to keep this going and put our spin on it and make sure the community still has this great resource." The spin that Lavery is referring to is a name change - Centennial Hall - and some much needed renovations to the building.

The name Centennial Hall is meaningful to the Lavery's because the Centennial hop is the main hop used in their Dulachan beer, their flagship brew. The usage of the word hall is in homage to Forward Hall, which was a huge part of the Laverys' lives.

With a considerable amount of renovations needed, Centennial Hall will remain open through the beginning of fall when the updates are scheduled to start taking place, still honoring shows that were already booked



Local long-standing all-ages venue Basement Transmissions has new owners and a new name. Bob Jensen has passed the torch to former bandmate Jason Lavery and his wife Nicole, both close friends. The spot will be renamed Centennial Hall.

at Basement Transmissions, with a few more in the works.

Some noticeable early changes will be new lighting, curtains, and reupholstered seating. Nikki also expressed a need to replace the ceiling and bring the room back to its traditional form. "The original ceiling is an arched ceiling, from when the building was a church, so I would really love to keep that look of open ceiling, for historical and acoustical purposes." Along with aesthetics, they plan on updating the stage with multiple curtains for theater use and a dropdown screen for showing films.

Once renovations are complete, Erie will have an up-to-date, multi-functional space similar in size to the Grog Shop in nearby Cleveland, a place where creativity can thrive. "I am hoping that it can be really eclectic. I want new local bands, comedy shows, film and dinner shows, actors looking for a theater space, as well as weddings and receptions, and business meetings. A community space where everyone feels welcome, not one particular community over another," states Nikki.

While they have contacted every local promotion company and even

some from neighboring cities, there is an understanding that it's going to take time for everything to fall into place. "It's going to take years to build trust; nothing is going to happen overnight. Once bands come here and see what a great venue and bar there is, we can start bringing in bigger name bands and have [more] affordable ticket pricing," explains Jason (alcohol sales help offset the admission costs needed to make a show profitable).

The venue plans on having food available and being stocked with your favorite Lavery brews, local wine, spirits, beer, non-alcoholic beer, sodas, and water. Centennial Hall will feel right at home behind Lavery's Brewing Company and The Bunker (where they can also still host shows, as needed), but there's still a lot of work ahead until the vision becomes clear.

Larry Wheaton was a member of the Basement Transmissions community, playing trombone with the Telefonics. He is also an avid fan of Lavery Brewing Company. His favorite beer is the Ulster Breakfast Stout (or the Devil Bird if it's in season). He can be reached at wheaton1138@gmail.com.



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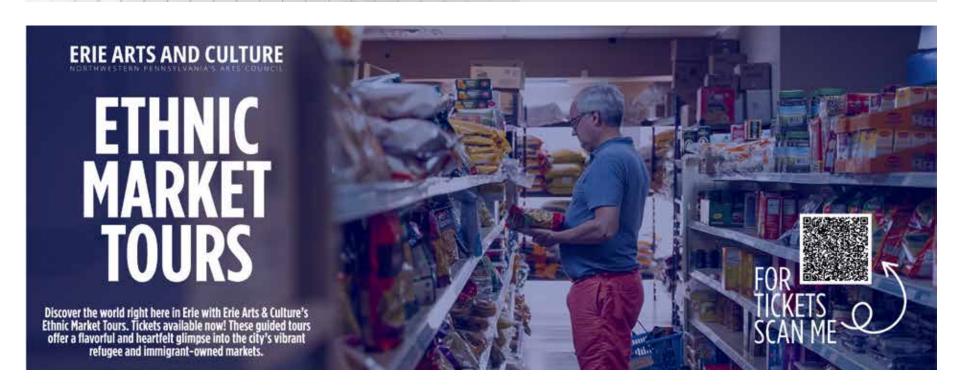
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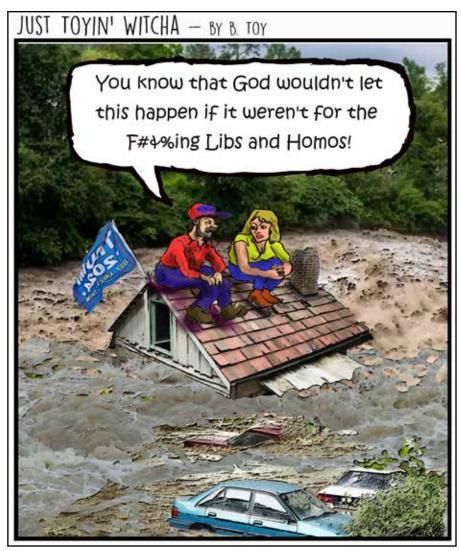
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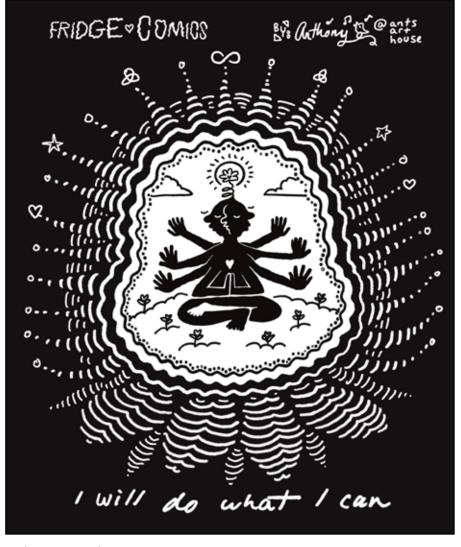
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#### **Across**

- 1. Over and done with
- 5. Teensy
- 9. "Let's \_\_\_ in the bud" 14. Plant with medicinal qualities
- 15. Links yell
- 16. Cornhuskers' largest city
- 17. Cleverest spot in the ocean?
- 19. Chafing results
- 20. Faline, in "Bambi"
- 21. Dive bar
- 23. Ink work
- 24. "Encore!"
- 26. Artist's output
- 28. Line from a society
- that trades lice for goods and services?
- 33. Maintains
- 34. Minor knee injury
- 35. Some non-zero num-
- 36. At full speed, aboard
- 37. Boxing maneuver
- 40. At the rear
- 42. Bring a smile to
- 44. How the dating dog trainers discovered they were a match?
- 47. Peabody-winning podcast of the 2010s
- 48. State, in Quebec
- 49. George's lyricist brother

- 50. Pole position holder
- 54. Org. of doctors
- 57. Figure skater Henie
- 59. Getting the rightsized headrest?
- 61. Pull at
- 62. Sulky look
- 63. Game resembling bingo
- 64. Showy daisy variety
- 65. Phish leader
- 66. Use the pool

Anastasio

#### Down

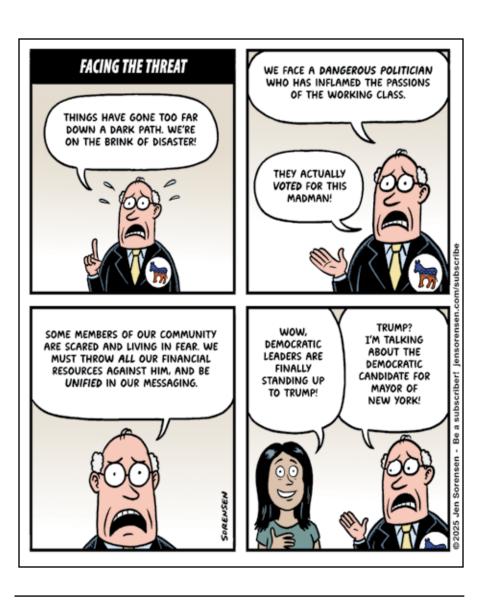
- 1. Settled a debt
- 2. As well
- 3. How some people swear
- 4. Top worn with jeans
- 5. Less solid
- 6. Municipality
- 7. Remove the edges of 8. Bigfoot's cold-weath-
- er cousin
- 9. Beastie Boys stipulation "Till Brooklyn"
- 10. "According to me," in shorthand
- 11. Sixth in a series
- 12. Media company words directly before "Radio" or "Media"
- 13. Savor
- 18. Shrek and Fiona, for example

22. "Freaky Friday" ac-

- tress Lindsay
  - 25. Unusual
    - 27. A, in some of the E.U.
    - 28. Word starting multi-
    - ple Lil Wayne album titles
    - 29. Immeasurable time unit (and yet it has a number)
    - 30. "Action \_\_\_ with re-
    - action"
    - 31. Warming wrap 32. "Lemon Tree" sing-
    - er Lopez 36. "\_\_\_ of Two Cities"
    - 37. Not many
    - 38. "\_\_\_ was saying ..."
    - 39. Money on the line
    - 40. .mp4 alternative
    - 41. Cargo ship's route
    - 42. Dog on "The Jetsons"
    - 43. NYC subway letters
    - 44. "Phantom of the
    - Opera" novelist Gaston
    - 45. Pumpkin hue
    - 46. Business for agents 47. "Law & Order" actor
    - 51. Abbr. on a schedule 52. Name in haute cou-
    - 53. Part of a crossword
    - 55. Teensy

Jeremy

- 56. Nuclear energy particle
- 58. Bliss
- 60. Cal. rows



#### Answers to last puzzle

| K | 0 |   |   |   | C | Α | Ш | Ł |   | F | R | 0 | Ζ | Е |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Α | R | М |   | М | Е | L | Е | Е |   | R | Α | В | Α | Т |
| S | ı | Р |   | F | L | 0 | 0 | R | М | 0 | Р | ı | S | Н |
| D | 0 | R | S | Α | L | F | I | Ν | I | S | Н |   |   |   |
| Α | L | 0 | Е |   |   | Т | ٧ | S | Е | Т |   | Р | Р | Р |
| Ν | Ε | ٧ | Α | D | Α |   |   |   | Ζ | Υ | Q | U | ı | L |
|   |   |   | Т | U | L | Α | Ν | Ε |   |   | U | Р | Т | 0 |
|   | Т | 0 | Т | Α | Ш | Ш | Υ | R | Α | D | 1 | S | Н |   |
| Р | Α | J | L |   |   | Α | С | Ш | Т |   | С |   |   |   |
| D | Ι | R | Ш | С | Т |   |   |   | Α | Z | K | Α | R | Α |
| Α | L | S |   | R | Е | S | Е | Т |   |   | Е | L | ı | S |
|   |   |   | С | Α | M | Р | Е | R | V | Α | Ν | 1 | S | Н |
| В | Ε | L | 0 | W | Р | Α | R |   | S | Η |   | S | Ε | L |
| Α | ٧ | Α |   | L |   | M |   | Ν | 0 | S |   | Т | U | Ε |
| D | Α | W | Ν | S |   | S | Е | Е | Р |   |   | S | Р | Υ |

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