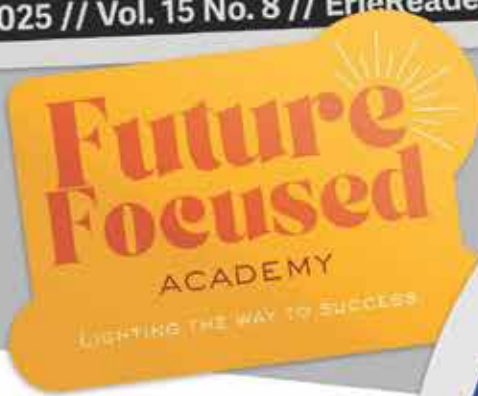
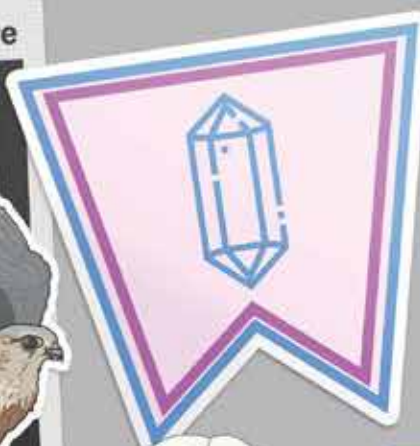
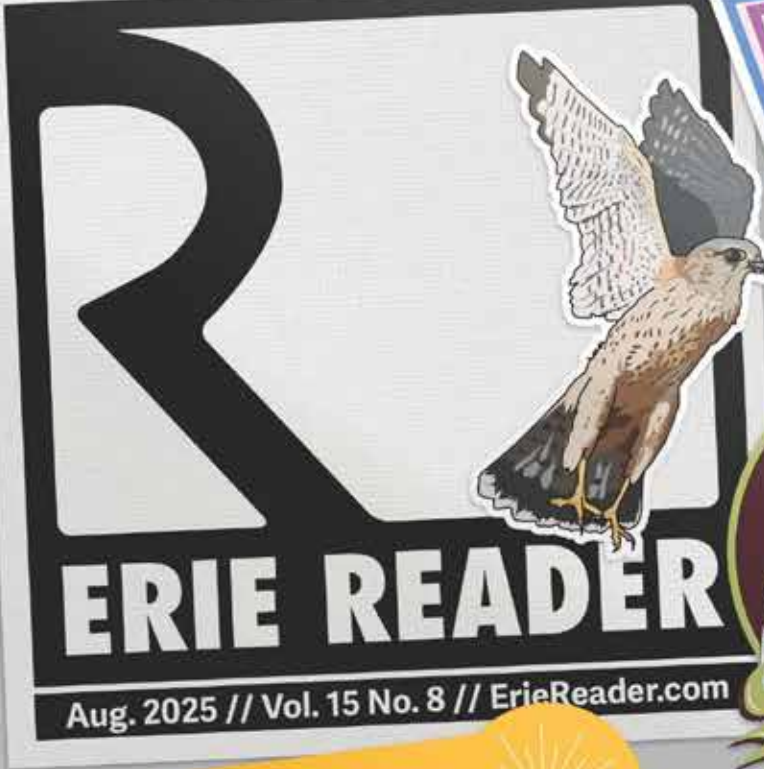


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From the Editors

Greetings from this modern world

Pretty much immediately after our glorious 2025 40 Under 40 issue was published at the beginning of July, the small but mighty Erie Reader team (which is all of four people) hit the road to Madison, Wisconsin for the annual Association of Alternative Newsmedia (AAN) conference. This was my second AAN conference and I was extremely excited to learn and absorb the knowledge and experience of people from all across the country who do what we do here. That is: to publish alternative print media and figure out how to survive.

Gathering together, we all share what has worked and what hasn't. We share story ideas. We share creative cover art. We brainstorm revenue avenues. This year, our own publisher Adam Welsh sat on a panel with our favorite lawyer ever, Paula Knudsen Burke of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and discussed with a room full of people how to "Survive Lawsuits and Legal Threats in the Current Environment," because we've (unfortunately) had to do that before.

And each year there is a keynote speaker, meant to inform or inspire us all to continue doing what we're doing despite the seemingly mounting evidence that print media is on its way out the door.

This year's keynote speaker was Dan Perkins (aka Tom Tomorrow) who is a well-loved weekly cartoonist of the

strip "This Modern World," famously a part of one of the OG alt-news-papers, the Village Voice. His work is now syndicated (the Village Voice closed its doors in 2018) and is ubiquitous, instantly recognizable, topical, irreverent, beautiful, and so very alt.

His message to us all was one of hope for print media. He said that this moment in American history is primed for an alt-weekly resurgence. That the inundation of all of our collective eyeballs with endless, horrifying (mis)information, advertisement, opinion, influence, and doom will inevitably drive humanity in the opposite direction.

He told the story of his young-adult son who, upon entering a room in Perkins' house full of records, posters, comic books, clippings, and alt-newspaper archives, said that he was so sad that he'd probably never have a room like this: full of tangible, collectable, readable items. Forms of entertainment that are slower, with no parasitic blue light to worm its way into our brains and keep us from sleep. Perkins said, "There is a *yearning* among young people for an analog experience they never got to have," and he called upon all of the editors, writers, and publishers in the room to "be the alternative to the hellscape." He said, "As the billionaire media figures out more and more ways to bend the knee, know that adversarial local journalism matters." And as Gannett



ERIN PHILLIPS
Legendary cartoonist Dan Perkins aka Tom Tomorrow was the keynote speaker at the recent Association of Alternative Newsmedia conference in Madison that the staff of the Erie Reader attended and was inspired by.

(which owns the Erie Times News) and other massive news corporations, are currently hurling career journalists from their sinking ships and leaning on AI to increase profits, we're still here actually writing, bringing Erie the adversarial, non-billionaire-influenced news. Essentially, working hard to be the alternative to the hellscape.

After only a few days among our ilk in Madison, any of our faltering resolve was solidified – to help keep

Erie as great and welcoming a place as we can, to report on what matters, to give the underdog a leg up, to support local arts and music, and to be adversarial despite political or internet reactions. After all, if we're to believe Tom Tomorrow's message, print media will long outlive the internet. Put down your phone, pick up a paper, slow down a minute, and, as always and with vigor, support local.

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Street Smarts: How to Support WQLN After Federal Funding Dropped

PBS affiliate to lose 40 percent of its annual budget in wake of cuts

By: Liz Allen

“Can you tell me how to get (how to get) to Sesame Street?”

Actually, my GPS did all the work by directing me to WQLN’s studio, located at the end of the road named after the celebrated Children’s Television Workshop program.

As I drove down Sesame Street in Summit Township, I cried – tears of joy for my younger self and tears of sadness for the loss of \$1.1 billion in funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The Republican-controlled Congress eliminated all federal support for National Public Radio, the Public Broadcasting Service and member stations, including WQLN, on July 18, 2025. Congress had previously approved this funding for two years for the fiscal year that started July 1. Now it’s all gone.

There is even more uncertainty about the future of public media nationally after the Corporation for Public Broadcasting announced on Aug. 1 that it is shutting down. Most of its 100 staff members will be laid off by Sept. 30, with a plan to fully shut down operations by January 2026.

In a prepared statement, Patricia Harrison, CPB’s president and CEO, said: “CPB remains committed to fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities and supporting our partners through this transition with transparency and care.”

For WQLN, those cuts mean a loss of 40 percent of its annual budget, said Alyson Amendola, WQLN’s vice president for advancement.

“We are so grateful that we have enjoyed bipartisan support for close to 60 years, since the inception of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting,” Amendola said. “We have never wavered from our mission to inform, educate, and engage. We create meaningful experiences by sharing enriching local and national content, providing safety and emergency communications that help save lives and property, educating children to prepare them for their next steps, and fostering connections that uplift and support the community.”

Cindy Spizarny, WQLN CEO, elaborated on what the elimination of funding means for WQLN. “We’re talking about \$1.2 million a year. We cannot fund-raise out of that,” said Spizarny. “We are being prudent with our expenses, with every dollar that comes in, with every dollar that goes out.”

Spizarny described the staff of 20 as “small and mighty,” with no overlap in departments. “They are being very loyal to us. We are trying not to touch the staff.”

I have been a loyal PBS viewer since 1970, when I got hooked on *Sesame Street* with my baby brother. He was three, I was 18. High on the lyrics about inclusion and acceptance in “Everyday People” by Sly and the Family Stone, I discovered a similar theme in Kermit’s signature song, “It’s Not Easy Bein’ Green.”

“When green is all there is to be, it could make

CONTRIBUTED



[Clockwise from top left] Brian Hannah, host of WQLN-FM’s *Classics with Brian Hannah*, is the only paid on-air host. The others are volunteers. // WQLN serves the community with its Sounds Around Town concert series, with good music and a relaxed atmosphere. // Children from the Buckethead KIDZ drumming program show off their talents at a concert at WQLN. // The STREAM Machine, a mobile classroom, provides lessons in science, technology, reading, engineering, art and math to kids in under-served areas. // Rob Hoff has volunteered at WQLN-FM for 52 years as a host of jazz programs. Jazz has always showcased lessons in democracy, as demonstrated in this new album, “We Insist 2025!”

you wonder why. But why wonder? Why wonder? I’m green and it’ll do fine. It’s beautiful, and I think it’s what I want to be,” Kermit crooned. So did Frank Sinatra in a cover of “Green,” I sassily informed my boyfriend, a huge Beatles’ fan. He knew the way to my heart, and rather than buy *Let It Be* for me, he gave me the first-ever *Sesame Street* LP for Christmas that year.

The Republican-controlled Congress gave Donald Trump a Christmas-in-July gift by wiping out all public media funding, money that had already been appropriated.

WQLN had begun preparing for the loss of federal funding a year ago, after Amendola read about the plan to go after the Corporation for Public Broadcasting on pages 235-236 in Project 2025. That is the Heritage Foundation’s blueprint “to downsize the federal government and fundamentally change how it works, including the tax system,

immigration enforcement, social welfare programs, and energy policy,” according to FactCheck.org at the Annenberg Public Policy Center.

Tipped off by Project 2025, WQLN’s staff and board prepared to survive the funding loss for this year. But there is a serious threat to the future of WQLN, a beloved community institution since the TV station went live in 1967 and the radio station started broadcasting in 1973.

“The Corporation for Public Broadcasting was established to provide backbone funding to public media stations, enabling them to share meaningful content with their communities, regardless of a person’s ZIP Code,” Amendola said. “But the loss of federal funding is irreplaceable and will have a devastating impact on our operations.”

For decades, WQLN has received kudos for creating local content, including *Free to Choose* in the 1980s with the late Milton Friedman, a conservative

University of Chicago economist, promoting free enterprise and personal liberty, when the late Robert Chitester headed WQLN.

In 1980, that series and other programming Chitester produced prompted Ralph Nader's National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting to call for Congressional hearings into what the committee claimed was WQLN's right-wing bias.

Other local programming has included *Guppies to Groupers*, Chitester's TV series on tropical fish, a docu-drama on famed Erie illustrator Eugene Iverd, nostalgic looks back at Koehler Brewing, the Boston Store, and Erie's Irish heritage, a nationally syndicated radio show with Ron Slomski, *Polish American Spotlight*, and the television series *Chronicles*, covering Erie history. *Chronicles* will wrap up its three-year run with programs on Marc Brown, author of the *Arthur* books and creator of the PBS program by the same name, and on Tom Ridge, former Pennsylvania governor and the first Secretary of Homeland Security.

Erie residents have always been proud that Brown and Ridge have Erie roots and they also have closely identified with WQLN employees and volunteers.

They have been able to match names and faces with the late Paul Brown, radio host of *Two Cents Worth*, described by *Showcase* writer Dave Richards as "the inquisitive broadcaster with a gentle voice" when he retired in 1990, jovial emcee Brady Louis, who retired in 1998 as president and general manager after four years, and Mavis Sergeant, the WQLN music librarian, remembered for her "eternal good humor" when she, too, retired in 1990.

Staffers were so fond of the late Tom McLaren, director of programming and production at WQLN, that they said he was "like our dad," said Patricia Combine, president at the time, when McLaren retired in 2002.

Amendola volunteered at WQLN for 30 years before she became development director. "No matter where I went, (people) would say, 'Oh, you're the WQLN girl,'" she said with a laugh. WQLN-FM has long been bolstered by a bevy of accomplished volunteers who host radio programs featuring jazz, classical music, and sacred music. Currently, there are 14 volunteer hosts, including Aubrey Dillon, Al Lubiejewski, and Rob Hoff, among others.

"Rob has been hosting *Jazz Flight* for over 52 years and wants to continue," said Amendola. Hoff, a native New Yorker, was wowed by Erie's jazz scene when he moved here in 1969 from the Twin Cities in Minnesota to teach psychology at Mercyhurst University, where he is now a professor emeritus.

He was quickly introduced to John Vanco, head of the Erie Art Center, which became the Erie Art Museum. "I went to the Art Center and we've been brothers in jazz ever since," he said. Many jazz musicians in Erie are, like him, also educators, he said, relaying an old joke: "What's the difference between a jazz musician and a pizza? With a pizza you can feed a family of four!"

Hoff said that "a great deal of jazz is directed to the challenges of our time." He recommended *We Insist 2025!* featuring Terri Lyne Carrington

and Christine Dashiell. Released in June, it's being called a "reimagining" of Max Roach's 1961 album, *We Insist!* "

"Jazz is inherently a democratic activity," Hoff said. The individual performer must pay attention to what the other musicians are doing, to create the sense of balance needed in the music. Hoff, for one, continues to contact U.S. Rep. Mike Kelly and Sens. John Fetterman and David McCormick to ask them to restore public media funding. "Keep the pressure on these politicians," he said. Anything that has been undone can be restored, Hoff said.

Since the funding cuts were approved, WQLN's Spizarny and Amendola have been heartened by the non-stop calls and emails from people with stories about their love and appreciation for WQLN and asking how to help.

One way is to donate on Erie Gives Day on Aug. 12 or during Crawford Gives Aug. 12-15. But Spizarny and Amendola also urge supporters to consider switching from "static" donations to sustaining gifts. Monthly donations help in preparing budgets, they said.

It's also vital to remember that publicly funded media is committed to informing and educating people, no matter where they live or what their politics are. WQLN's reach goes as far as Crawford, Warren, Venango, and Mercer counties in Pennsylvania, Ashtabula County in Ohio, Chautauqua County in New York, and London, Ontario.

And just as when my brother was 3 years old and later when my boys watched *Mister Roger's Neighborhood*, WQLN continues to teach children from their youngest years. Two examples at WQLN are its "Buckethead KIDZ" and "STREAM Machine" programs.

"Each year, hundreds of fifth-grade students across our region receive weeks of instruction in bucket drumming. The classes are led by their school's music teacher where they learn to read notes and create rhythmic grooves," Amendola said. "At the end of the school year, hundreds of fifth graders are invited to play in the front yard of WQLN to jam with local musician Jim Dowds. WQLN Buckethead KIDZ is supported by the Les Paul Foundation and the Dougie Bleu Foundation."

The "STREAM Machine" brings pop-up classrooms to community centers, playgrounds, community events and neighborhoods where "resources are needed most," Amendola said.

"We're putting our mission in motion with this mobile outreach vehicle, stocked with PBS KIDS-themed STREAM Kits and books. The programming is designed to engage students and families with remarkable learning opportunities in the areas of science, technology, reading, engineering, art, and math."

If you reach out to federal lawmakers, as Hoff has done, you could direct them to the song on *The Official Sesame Street 2* album, "Everyone Makes Mistakes," by Big Bird.

Liz Allen also owns Songs from the Street, a boxed set of three CDs, released in 2004. She can be reached at liz-erie@aol.com

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Our West Bayfront is (Literally) Building Up Community

Volunteer-led renovation saves blighted building, aids in affordable home ownership

By: Erin Phillips

Back in 2020 when I first started writing for the Reader, I had the opportunity to include my nonprofit pick in the annual Erie Reader Gives feature (you can read this year's version with-in this issue). That year I chose to donate to our local neighborhood support organization Our West Bayfront (OWB) stating, and I'll quote myself here, "Our West Bayfront has helped me achieve a major parenting goal, which is to instill a sense of community in my children: your neighbors are like your family and helping them helps everyone have a better quality of life."

My husband and I moved into this neighborhood back in 2004 and eventually purchased our home here in 2009 (the West Bayfront neighborhood stretches from Sassafras to Weschler, and from the Bayfront south to West 12th Street) and since that time, we have witnessed so many positive changes – changes that have actively increased that sense of community including outreach, area clean-ups, public events allowing us to gather as a neighbors, and so many opportunities to help.

One such opportunity became available in 2023 when OWB was tipped off by the Erie Land Bank about a property within their footprint, 811 W. Seventh St., that was considered blighted – it had been sitting, empty and abandoned, for over 10 years. OWB, at that time helmed by Executive Director Anna Frantz, was able to purchase the property from the Land Bank with the intention to renovate the home. Inspired by his work with Habitat for Humanity, OWB board member Seph Kumer suggested that the organization utilize the willingness of so many neighbors and organizations to volunteer to help renovate and restore the home. Frantz comments, "We knew people wanted a different way to contribute directly ... a way for people to really work in a tangible way to improve the neighborhood. We also had the right team in place at OWB – with staff like Dan Pertl who could manage the construction side and Marissa Litzenberg who could organize and motivate lots of volunteers – and with the opportunity for grant funding from the Emerging Erie Fund, it all came together."

In November of 2023, the first work began on the home that is often simply referred to as 811. The women's basketball team from Gannon University spent that first weekend hauling out trash, debris, and furniture that was left abandoned in the home to clear things out and get a better sense of what they were dealing with. And it wasn't pretty.

Luckily, along with an army of neighborhood volunteers, a few skilled lead volunteers stepped up to direct the work, many of whom are retired contractors including Bren Lindell, Doug Boucher, Tom Alderton, and Brett McCorkle. These folks have dedicated multiple days a week for years to the renovation, and have provided valuable skills and knowledge to

ERIN PHILLIPS



The team at Our West Bayfront includes (from left) Property Asset Manager Joel Travis, Executive Director Gretchen Kerr, and Neighborhood Outreach Manager Starla Cochenour, who have all gotten their hands dirty in the volunteer-led community renovation at 811 W. Seventh Street.

see this project through to completion. McCorkle reflected on the condition of the home when they first took on the project, "Saying the home was in rough shape doesn't do it justice. It was derelict. It was full of garbage. It was water-damaged. There was mold in the basement covering everything."

But it wasn't always this way. For most of this building's history, it was a well-loved family home. Constructed around 1907, one of the earliest occupants was the Aldrich family. J.D. Aldrich was a decorator, painter, and hardwood refinisher by trade. Later in the home's history, it came into the Quirk family, who occupied the home throughout most of its history. John Quirk was the general manager of the Erie Wallpaper and Paint company. His wife Carrie was a local musician and was the organist at St. Patrick's Church. The couple had five children who grew up in this house. After John and Carrie passed away, their son William lived in the home with his wife Patricia. William was a physics and chemistry teacher at Academy High School and Patricia was a nurse at St. Vincent Hospital. At some point after the Quirks, the home was occupied by someone who eventually abandoned it. All this is to say, what was left in disrepair and destruction was once a home with a rich history full of love and family – and that history deserves to be honored. A vacant lot doesn't contribute to the story of a neighborhood and no one at OWB wanted to see that happen to this home.

Since the beginning of the project in 2023, there has been a total staff overhaul at OWB. Gretchen Kerr, who is a neighbor and a long-time volunteer with OWB, has taken over the executive director role while Starla Cochenour is now the neighborhood outreach manager and Joel Travis is the property asset manager. I met with all three of them as work on the home nears the finish line, but it wasn't my first time in the home.

On March 16, 2024, I volunteered, along with a group of Gannon students, some friends and neighbors, and the staff of OWB to help out at the home. Many were tasked with clearing out some rotting fencing in the backyard, some were working on stripping out a back addition that had suffered significant water damage, and I was in a room with a few others removing wallpaper to (hopefully) salvage the plaster and save on drywall costs. It was incredibly inspiring to see so many people dedicating their Saturday to help keep a local home from ending up in the landfill, to continue contributing its character to our neighborhood, and to eventually become a safe, affordable home for a local family. That is really the end goal of this whole project: to honor the home and the neighborhood, while also providing a stable place for a family to build a life.

Enter the Cornerstone Community Land Trust (CCLT). Since OWB was able to obtain the property at 811 W. Seventh St. from the Land Bank for a very low price, and because the work being done

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OUR WEST BAYFRONT/ERIN PHILLIPS



These photos show a before and after of an addition on the back of the home at 811 W. Seventh Street that was water-damaged, rotting, and in major disrepair when Our West Bayfront took ownership of the home from the Land Bank in 2023. Today, the area has been totally repaired and made safe and beautiful through the work of neighborhood volunteers.

on the house is coming largely from volunteer labor (keeping in mind, those things that require licenses to complete like electrical work, plumbing, and HVAC, along with some of the more detailed skillful jobs have been contracted out using grant or sponsorship funding), OWB now has the opportunity to donate this home to the CCLT.

The director of the CCLT, Kyra Taylor (Erie's 40 Under 40 Class of 2020), who is also the co-founder and executive director of Erie's Black Wall Street, explains the program: "The Cornerstone Community Land Trust was created to address the need for permanently affordable homeownership in Erie. As a land trust, we acquire and retain ownership of the land, while allowing individuals and families to purchase the homes built on that land. This structure ensures long-term affordability while allowing residents to build equity and remain rooted in their neighborhoods."

Cochenour concurs, "With renovations can come displacement of folks, and as property values continue to rise, things get more sensitive. CCLT kind of helps nip that in the bud." And 811 will be the very first home brought into the budding CCLT program. Taylor notes, "It represents so much more than just one unit of housing. This home is a community-driv-

en rehabilitation project powered by volunteer labor and neighborhood energy. Once complete, the home will be sold to an income-qualified buyer through the CCLT model, preserving affordability now and for future generations."

Additionally, the land trust prevents behaviors like flipping and price gouging, slum landlords or, really, rentals of any kind, and the CCLT has built-in protections so if the family is having trouble making their mortgage, the land trust is there as a parachute. And if or when the family who owns the home decides to sell it, they must sell the home at market rate, while the land remains with the trust. This helps prevent properties from falling into disrepair while assisting families in building up generational stability and wealth, and at the same time stabilizing the neighborhood. It feels like a revolutionary concept, but this type of program exists and is successful in a number of places throughout the country. Erie is just getting started.

"CCLT operates in collaboration with a growing network of mission-aligned partners, including Our West Bayfront, Erie's Black Wall Street, Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network, St. Martin Center, GECAC, and others," Taylor shares. "These organizations play a vital role in community outreach, homeowner education, and identifying qualified buyers. The land trust model is rooted in partnership and stewardship, and these local groups are essential to that ecosystem."

When it comes to that kind of cross-organizational cooperative ecosystem, the 811 project stands as a perfect example. OWB's property asset manager Joel Travis started his career in contracting doing residential remodels, but he felt the call to help on a larger scale. Since, he has worked as an instructor in the construction trades training program at Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT). Starla Cochenour was actually a student of his – having gone through ECAT's construction trades program herself, to better understand the scope of work and increase her effectiveness on projects like 811. Travis shares, "ECAT was when I first stepped into the nonprofit world, volunteering, being present, and seeing what needs were in the city. And I fell in love with it through that program." And now he's on staff at OWB, using his skills in both instruction (which is a huge part of managing a team of volunteers) and construction.

Additionally, construction students from ECAT get to put their newly learned skills into practice at 811. Kerr comments on the collaboration, "We're having on-the-job training with the trade students with ECAT, not only on this house, but also on people's properties with residents who need help – so they get the experience of working with a client." She continues, "It's a symbiotic relationship with a lot of nonprofits. Groundwork Erie is maintaining all of our lots. They're doing all of our mowing – so instead of paying a local landscaper, we're paying Groundwork Erie for that work. So it's all coalescing into a large shared ecosystem of training for youth, summer employment, and property management needs. And I can see it growing."

Cochenour concurs, "This project isn't happening in a vacuum. It requires so much collaboration with other nonprofits, volunteers, and neighbors. It's our project but it's also everybody else's, so it's nice to see everyone corralling around it. I'm going to be sad when it's over, even though I'll be so excited to see a family here."

While the project is not yet complete, it is definitely getting close. Recently volunteer employee groups from National Fuel have come in to completely paint the first floor in one go. McCorkle shares, "I've lost count of the number of volunteers who came through. I organized three or four different groups of employees from Erie Insurance to come through and help, nearing almost 200 hours of volunteer time." The upper floors are still a ways from completion, but once they're over the final hurdle, OWB plans to hold an open house celebration to thank the community for all of their hours of help.

Kerr speaks on the scope of the whole project, "Working on this house has been one of my favorite things to do since I started this job. It truly is working with people in your neighborhood on a large scale project where you see immediate results and I've loved it."

As I reflect on that statement I made about Our West Bayfront way back in 2020, I can say with certainty that the organization has helped to instill a sense of community in my children. We know everyone on our block, we say hello as we pass, we help each other shovel out our elderly neighbors, we join each other for community events (like last Tuesday's National Night Out in Gridley Park or Porchfest coming up in September), and we volunteer together. We all know, deep down, that we have each other's backs. Projects like 811 bring our neighborhood even closer – and I can say with certainty that whatever lucky family gets to eventually live in 811, which has been touched by so much generosity and love, that they will be welcomed into Our West Bayfront with warm, open arms.

While the lion's share of the work that has happened at 811 has come from volunteers, the project's material costs were covered through generous community sponsorships and funding from the Emerging Erie Fund and Great Lakes Insurance.

Our West Bayfront is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. Additionally, other nonprofits mentioned in this article are participating including ECAT, Groundwork Erie, Sisters of St. Joseph, Erie's Black Wall Street, St. Martin Center, and GECAC. Visit eriegives.org to donate.

If you're interested in volunteering with Our West Bayfront, either at 811 or in any other capacity, visit ourwestbayfront.org

Erin Phillips, when not standing in awe at the bay view, the historic homes, or the lovely people in her West Bayfront neighborhood, can be reached at erin@eriereader.com

From Gallery to Clinic: LECOM Students Step into Erie's Art Scene

Visual Thinking Strategies programming channels power of observation

By: Chloe Forbes

If Dr. Silvia Ferretti hadn't become a physician, she would've pursued a life in the arts. She wasn't born a Van Gogh or a Rembrandt, she admits, but her appreciation for creativity runs deep. Just outside her office sits an administrative assistant who once danced professionally as a ballerina in New York City, trading pointe shoes for paperwork – but never losing her love for performance.

The lesson? Art is everywhere. And now, Ferretti – provost, senior vice president, and dean of academic affairs at the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM) – wants her medical students to see that, too.

In a new partnership with the Erie Art Museum, LECOM is introducing art-focused programming into its curriculum, blending creativity with clinical care to help future physicians see with more than just their eyes. The programming, referred to as “Visual Thinking Strategies” aims to teach students to observe their surroundings and deepen their critical thinking.

There will be cohorts of about 10 to 15 students throughout the year that visit the museum for the training and will learn how to look at things through the eyes of someone else. “Unless somebody tells you that and brings you through it, it's not intuitive, necessarily,” Ferretti said. “What's intuitive is that you like certain colors and it moves you, but it's not intuitive to know the history of why that subject was chosen or what the small symbolism in it is.”

She remarked that liberal art schools have historically taught art history, but as curricula change, it's not as common. With this training, she hopes to strengthen a student's holistic understanding of their future patients and their experiences.

“You use all your senses when you learn something,” Ferretti said. “A doctor certainly is not only hearing what the patient has to say but observing what the patient has to say and observing the state they're in when they say it.”

It's not just about skills, though. The partnership is meant to get people to the heart of downtown and promote wellness. A study published in the *Medical Science Educator* in 2022 even found that arts courses help mitigate medical student burn-out. “Art and creativity are increasingly recognized as viable ways to combat stress, loneliness, anxiety, depression, and more,” said Laura Domencic, executive director of the Erie Art Museum. “This partnership with LECOM will provide their students with an opportunity to learn about the therapeutic opportunities in art.”

After the first year, LECOM will review feedback from students then tailor and hopefully expand the program. Ferretti said it's her goal to integrate it into their master's and early acceptance programs, too, as they're affiliated with local colleges and universities.

“We can give them exposure to it,” she said. “So we think when you're affiliated with us, even before you become a medical student, this will be an opportunity to use this program.”

Ferretti said the program supports LECOM's mission to shape not just skilled physicians, but compassionate, community-minded individuals. By stepping outside the classroom and into Erie's cultural spaces, students can both decompress from the rigors of medical training and sharpen their ability to observe – not just symptoms, but people.

By weaving art into its curriculum, LECOM is embracing a broader vision of medical education – one that values empathy as much as anatomy, and observation beyond the confines of a lab.



Kristen Karrfalt, development director for the Erie Art Museum (left) and Dr. Ferretti celebrate the recent partnership between LECOM and the Art Museum, as students learn about the therapeutic opportunities that art provides.

bracing a broader vision of medical education – one that values empathy as much as anatomy, and observation beyond the confines of a lab.

“I'm really thrilled about having the experience with them because I think it just broadens the horizons of these young people,” Ferretti remarked. “You know sometimes when you're going to be a doctor or going into the sciences, you don't have time for other things, but if you feel the other things will benefit what your main goal is, then you know you've killed two birds with one stone. So if they can learn empathy and observation and then they also start to develop an enjoyment for the arts, that's great.”

The Erie Art Museum and LECOM are both participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. To donate, visit erie-gives.org

Chloe Forbes is a local journalist who believes future doctors should consider hanging a whimsical cat painting in their office. Reach her at chloeforbes14@gmail.com.

9/3 THE LIFE OF CHUCK
with **VISCOUS** an Edinboro short film by Brad Pattullo
From childhood to adulthood, Chuck Krantz (Tom Hiddleston) sees the wonder of love, the heartbreak of loss, and the multitudes contained in all of us. Showing a sweeter side of director Mike Flanagan's deeply-felt emotional register, *Chuck* is a buoyant and wonderful adaptation of one of Stephen King's more cosmically optimistic tales. 2025. Drama/Fantasy/Sci-Fi. Rated R.

9/10* CIVIL WAR
In a dystopian future, four journalists travel across the United States during a nation-wide conflict. While trying to survive, they aim to reach the White House to interview the president before he is overthrown. Alex Garland's (*Ex Machina*, *Annihilation*) film offers a gripping close-up look at the violent uncertainty of life in a nation in crisis. 2024. Political Thriller/Action. Rated R.

10/20 Collective at 1020 Holland St., Erie PA
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*Includes 5 PM Secret Film Screening

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MATEWAN 9/17*
OSCAR NOMINEE BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY In 1920 West Virginia, a labor union organizer (Chris Cooper) arrives in an embattled coal community where they are being brutally and violently dominated and harassed by the mining company. The Battle of Matewan marked a turning point in the struggle for workers' rights in the USA. Also starring James Earl Jones, David Strathairn, Mary McDonnell. 1987. Period Drama. Rated PG-13.

THE BIBI FILES 9/24*
Alexis Bloom's riveting film is built around leaked tapes of the police interrogation of Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and provides an unflinching gaze into the private world behind the headlines. Petty vanity and a sense of entitlement leads to corruption, and the unwillingness of the Netanyahus to give up power. The extreme right senses opportunity in Bibi's weakness, and the dominos fall. 2025. Documentary. Not Rated.

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Edwina Tries... Pickleball

Better late than never to try this craze with seriously sweaty staying power

By: Edwina Capozziello

I used to play soccer. I was never great, but I loved it and only stopped playing after a badly broken leg left me a little fearful. Mind you, I broke my leg falling down basement stairs, not scoring some legendary goal. I'm also kind of a klutz who probably tries too hard at everything. So, the thought of trying a new (sometimes) team sport is daunting to me, at best. I want to get some exercise, I want to have fun, and I don't want to get hurt. Enter pickleball.

Some quick research shows that pickleball was invented in 1965 (usapickleball.org if you really want to nerd out), meaning that it's not exactly a new game but certainly has gained epic popularity in recent years. You know something has reached pinnacle status when there are themed items in TJ Maxx and Aldi. In my personal circle of family and friends, we have a certified pickleball aficionado in Dan Austin who recently rounded up his posse and treated me to a private lesson.

I read up on the rules so I'd know my "dinks" from my "volleys," donned a cute black skort, and jumped in with both flat-shoed feet. The cheap backyard toy paddles I'd brought along were immediately dismissed and Dan loaned me a much lighter and clear-

ly better version. The energy among my hosts was palpable as we set up to play. I watched a few matches of 2-on-2 and then rotated in. Everyone helped me remember the basics: call out the score before serving, serve diagonally, serve and stay, move up to the kitchen line (defining the 7-foot non-volley zone on either side of the net), etc. And they cheered me on when I made contact (and when I didn't), especially when a decent surprise backhand made an appearance.

This particular group of pickleball players met at the Glenwood YMCA and includes multiple tournament winners and finalists who meet regularly to work on their game strategy. They're having serious fun. I worked up a sweat while not feeling like I might drop dead and I look forward to playing again soon. But, not before I invest in more cute clothes and a much better paddle.

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

The YMCA of Greater Erie is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. To donate, visit eriegives.org



This month, Edwina tries out the rapidly growing sport and fitness craze of pickleball, joining a group led by family-friend and seasoned pickler Dan Austin, learning the ropes at the local YMCA.

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Take Your Beer for a Walk

Let’s celebrate Erie at Celebrate Erie, shall we, Erie?

By: Jeff McCullor

How often do you celebrate Erie? Daily? Bi-weekly? Maybe just annually?

CelebrateErie is upon us, citizens! Now’s your chance to relish in all-things-Erie during the yearly street party with an adult beverage in your hand. You can experience so much while taking your beer for a walk.

The event’s officially sanctioned beer garden is located at the northwest corner of Perry Square; just look for the grouping of pop-up canopies and string lights. This feels like a great place to start our downtown adventure so get yourself all prepped with a pint and let’s take a spin around the festival!

First stop, the **Food District**. You’ll find it directly across the sidewalk from the beer garden and encircling the Perry Square stage, radiating the delicious smells of all sorts of goodies from the likes of A Waffle Miracle, Triple D’s, Stanganelli’s, and the Happy Camper Snack Shack. These food vendors are set up the whole weekend so swing by for a bite, take in some local music like Ladders, Cosmic Rhythm, and Storms Within on the Perry Square stage and indulge a bit with your beer. Cheers to you, food folks! Thanks for keeping us fed the entire weekend!

Next we’ll head south, crossing South Park Row and entering the **Erie Insurance Marketplace**, where individual businesses are set up on both sides of the street, all the way to Eighth Street. Here you can find everything from custom artwork, jewelry, fresh-cut flowers, even information on the must-attend Eerie Horror Fest event in October. Cheers to you, marketplace vendors!

Keep heading south across the Eighth Street intersection and you’ll find one of my favorite parts of CelebrateErie, the Marquette Savings Bank **Chalk Walk**. Here you’ll encounter local and regional artists painstakingly working their tails off to create artwork right on the pavement in real time, as it loops up and down both sides of the street. You can revisit this area throughout the weekend and watch the

art progress. Give these folks some encouragement when you stroll past, or bring them a beer? Hey, it couldn’t hurt. Cheers to you, Chalk Walk artists!

After we circled around the Chalk Walk we’re automatically headed back northwards through the marketplace area, where the **Living Room Stage** is set up on the east side of the street in front of the Highmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield building. This stage will see the likes of Elle Taylor, Psych Patrol, and Spades among others. This stage is conveniently situated at ground level so you can get all up close and personal with the musicians. Cheers to you, Living Room Stage bands!

We’ll keep heading north through the remainder of the marketplace vendor strip, popping out at the southern edge of the **VNET Family District** where all the family-oriented organizations set up, along the eastern side of Perry Square. Here you’ll find pop-up tents populated with groups like WQLN, The Erie Philharmonic, The Brown Clowns, and performances by Park’s Taekwondo, Sovereign Ballet, and Kellar’s: Modern Magic. Mix in a little zip through the fountain on a hot day and kids of all ages will be appreciative of this part of CelebrateErie. Cheers to you, family-friendly organizers!

From here, we’ll mosey on a bit more northward along State Street into a weird no man’s land during the daytime hours, a gap in the festival intended to absorb all the humans attending mainstage shows Friday through Sunday nights. During your time above North Park Row take a bit of time to visit the **Flagship City District** businesses effectively cut off from the world during CelebrateErie. Some key spots include: The Flagship City Food Hall, Luminary Distilling, Glass Grower’s Gallery, The Dollhouse at Pointe Foure, Hazards Golf Mini Golf Social Pub, Copper Carriage, Ember & Forge, UPick6 Tap House, and others along the way. You’ll probably need to refresh your beer at this point – you’ve covered a lot of steps so far! Cheers to you, local brick and mortar businesses!



There’s no better way to take advantage of Erie’s lack of open container law than a stroll around Celebrate Erie. Take a walk through the annual festival with brewer Jeff McCullor as he tells us all about what to expect from this year’s celebration.

There’s only one stop left, the **Mainstage**. You can’t miss it, it’s that huge stage-thing sitting at the corner of Fourth and State streets. Friday night’s headliner is country star Russell Dickerson with local support from Matt Texter & The One Shots and Brenna Bone. He’s on a national tour so this will bring out the fans for sure. Saturday takes us back to the early 2000s with rock-rap group, gymclassheroes. Local group Reminiscent opens up the evening, consisting of singers Rasia Crockett, Anoa Hobson, and Andrani Foster Samuel. Rochester-based Bachata Rebelde is also on Saturday’s bill. Sunday we’re treated with all local music: Preach Freedom and Connect, bob. (an Interpretation of Bob Dylan), and Erie All Stars Present: The Beatles. Cheers to you mainstage musicians!

Keep drinking, walking, supporting local, and celebrating Erie.

Cultures, Arts, Festivals and Events of Erie (CAFE), which supports Celebrate Erie, is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. To donate, visit eriegives.org

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August 2025 Bird of the Month: Merlins

Agile flyers to both love and hate

By: Mary Birdsong

Merlins, small falcons that make their presence known with strident calls, are birds with which I have a very complex relationship. At home in the city, they are my favorite falcon and I am proud to say I found the first successfully fledged nest in Erie County a block from my home in 2014.

At Gull Point on Presque Isle State Park, however, when I am working as Erie Bird Observatory's lead shorebird monitor, tasked with keeping track of the endangered Great Lakes Piping Plovers nesting there, Merlins are my sworn enemy. These nimble flyers with sharp talons are considered the most dangerous predator to these small, plump shorebirds.

Merlins can be recognized as small hawk-like birds that sit upright on their perch. They are compact, with a wingspan of 24 inches, dark backs, and longish, striped tails.

So, to help me resolve this dichotomy, I choose to hate Merlins in the summer when Piping Plovers are present at Gull Point and love them in the winter when they regularly perch in my mid-town neighborhood.

New to our region, Merlins have been expanding their geographic range since the 1960s when the species began a recovery from its DDT-era population low. The species has also made a notable move into urban areas, where in the past they had been more abundant in rural, forested habitat.

MARY BIRDSONG



Mary Birdsong, the lead shorebird monitor for the Erie Bird Observatory, has a love/hate relationship with the Merlin. On one hand, it's a very cool neighbor in an urban environment, on the other, it's a predator making avian conservation efforts more difficult.

They are so new to the Erie region that maps showing the range of the species often do not include our area. But they are here and are year-round residents. Any time is good for finding them but they are more vocal during the summer breeding season. They often perch on the top of utility poles or large conifers.

Merlins can be recognized as small hawk-like birds that sit upright on their perch. They are compact, with a wingspan of 24 inches, dark backs (called a mantle in the bird world) and longish, striped tails. The females can be a bit larger than the males and are browner, while the males appear bluish-gray.

They are fast and powerful flyers who take most

of their prey on the wing. Their diet almost exclusively consists of small birds and they are capable of rapid and impressive aerial maneuvers when seeking that prey. Their average speed is approximately 30 mph (50 kph).

Their speed and maneuverability make them both beautiful and deadly – so for me, a delight and a scourge. But that, I suppose, is nature doing what it needs to do.

Mary Birdsong is the lead shorebird monitor for Erie Bird Observatory, which is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. Visit eriegives.org to donate. Mary can be reached at mbirdsong@eriereader.com

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The Reader Beat Monthly Recap

Summary of July Council Meetings

By: Alana Sabol

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

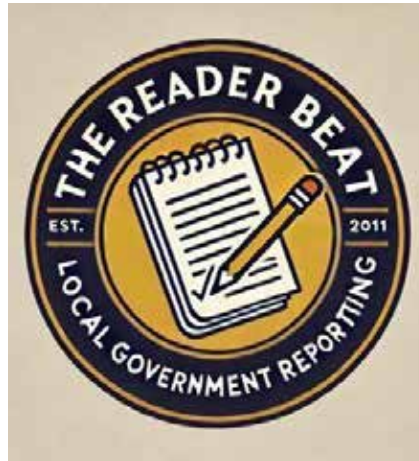
City Council July 2:

Public comments addressed the recent heat wave in the Erie area, calling for the city government to get involved in providing resources to protect citizens from heat-related illnesses and dehydration. Constituent Nathan George suggested that the city create more permanent cooling structures and shelters. "We have to continue to adapt as a species and as a city if we as unhoused, poor, working, disabled, elderly, and disenfranchised people hope to survive the unfolding climate crisis," George said. An ordinance appropriating a total of \$2,780,245 for the Community Development Block Grant projects was passed unanimously by council.

"We should all have empathy for the family and the community that's hurting. I hope there is a speedy investigation and justice is served."
– Erie County Councilmember Rock Copeland on the death of Marchello Woodard

County Council July 15:

Councilmember Rock Copeland brought attention to the death of Marchello Woodard, an unarmed Black man killed by a state parole agent on July 2. "We should all have empathy for the family and the community that's hurting," Copeland said. "I hope there is a speedy investigation and justice is served." A resolution was added to the agenda to endorse the Mercy Center for Women's appli-



cation for Health Choices Investment funds to provide housing, healthcare, food, and other social services to Erie County's impoverished community. The resolution passed unanimously.

City Council July 16:

The council chambers were full of community members, the majority there to demand justice for Marchello Woodard. Twenty-five constituents spoke, resulting in nearly two hours of public comments. Charles Woodard, the father of the victim, expressed his grief over his son's death. "I had to bury my son," he said. "Next time, you should respect that badge to honor, serve, and protect the community."

Others asked for explicit change to be made, referencing gaps in the justice system, holding officers accountable, and the lack of answers given to the community during the course of the investigation. Council President Mel Witherspoon announced that he would ask the council to write a letter to the District Attorney to request more transparency during the investigation.

What's coming up this month?:

City Council Meeting:

August 6 at 9 a.m.

County Council Meeting:

August 12 at 6 p.m.

City Council Meeting:

August 20 at 6:30 p.m.

County Council Meeting:

August 26 at 6 p.m.

ABC's of Building Better Lives

Mary Lynn Rote, LPC, CADC

Rob Giannamore, LPC

Jillian Rhoades, LCSW

Alen Melik-Adamyan, LCSW

Samantha Marcinko, LPC

Sara Allegretto, LPC

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ENROLLING AGES 3 TO 5 FOR THE 2025-2026 SCHOOL YEAR!

Future Focused Academy: Helping Young Adults Succeed

Local nonprofit teaches high school grads important life skills

By: Ally Kutz

Thinking back, what lessons can you remember from high school? Maybe you can string together a sentence from your language course or tell someone that the mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell. But can you recall any lessons that taught you about taxes and how they apply to you, what insurance is and how it works, or even how to write a check?

Having worked in the financial industry for close to a decade, I've witnessed firsthand many people under the age of 30 who aren't familiar with these concepts, but it is through no fault of their own. As a society, we benchmark success in schools on test scores and not much else – don't get me wrong, some of the information learned is important and necessary to know, but too often kids memorize the information for a test to then push it from their minds to memorize the next data set.

Danielle Randall also saw the dilemma in these important life lessons missing from the curriculum. Having started in the Erie School District as a substitute teacher, she soon realized that these things should be taught to young adults getting ready for the real world.

In her final year as a substitute, Randall was working with 12th grade students, many of whom would come to her for advice and help. "These are kids that are getting ready to graduate and in the eyes of society, are going to be adults and are just expected to know all these things," Randall said. "They would start coming to me, asking for a lot of this information, which is when I realized that we are not preparing these kids."

"But a lot of young adults don't feel they have a trusted source to go to for this information, or they don't have someone that can help set them on a path to where they need to be," she continued. "I wanted to develop a program that could lead them to, not only the information, but also to those trusted sources."

Randall then designed the curriculum for Future Focused Academy with 18- to 22-year-olds in mind: "I started finding that this age group is what I call the 'forgotten demographic' –

we have so much programming for K through 12, but then when they turn 18 and leave high school, there's really no programming for them," she said. "And I found that these young adults are in the most need for this information, because they're now trying to function like adults but don't have the right tools."

The vision was simple and straightforward: create a curriculum that teaches young adults important topics like insurance, building credit, and networking, and also applies those lessons to real-life situations, allowing the students to better understand how they work in everyday life. The vision has grown as the program has continued.

"I originally only designed the program as a 6-week cohort, but as the first group was finishing, they said they wanted more," Randall said. "I knew it wouldn't make sense for them to go back through the same information,

The vision [for Future Focused Academy] was simple and straightforward: create a curriculum that teaches young adults important topics like insurance, building credit, and networking, and also applies those lessons to real-life situations, allowing the students to better understand how they work in everyday life.

so that's when I developed the second level of the program."

So far, Randall has had five cohorts completed in total (three in level one and two in level two), with each composed of between five to eight young adults to help foster a community feeling while also being able to give individualized attention when needed. Level one classes include the topics of banking, credit, the "Financial Trap," budgeting, insurance, and networking, while level two focuses on career-related classes (applications and resumes, interview skills, professional communication), taxes, more advanced insurance, and housing.



Erie's Future Focused Academy is a newly formed nonprofit that helps to prepare freshly graduated young people to understand and manage their personal finances in a knowledgeable and responsible way, bridging a financial literacy gap left by most high schools. Founder Danielle Randall has helped educate five cohorts of five to eight students each, to date.

Future Focused Academy's community partners include Radius Co-Work, Erie County Community College, the Erie Center for Arts & Technology (ECAT), Erie Federal Credit Union, Erie's Black Wall Street, ERIEBANK, the Erie Downtown Development Corporation, and French Creek Settlement Services. Each of these organizations has worked to show how many of the program's topics apply to real-world workplaces and situations and have provided opportunities for networking and growth to the students.

The program also equips students with a head-start on their financial journey – completing the course along with other prerequisites can earn each participant up to \$500. Some have saved those funds, while others have helped their families or put it towards an important purchase like a vehicle or college supplies. One alum even used it to start his own business and register an LLC.

Thanks to their tour of ECAT, one Future Focused alum went on to attend and graduate in the first class of ECAT's Freedom House Foundation – a 5-week program sponsored by UPMC Health Plan that focuses on teaching basic healthcare topics while also introducing the variety of careers available in the healthcare industry. "For

me, that's what it's really about," Randall said. "It's helping them make connections within the community, to find what they want to pursue."

Another alum, Anthony, is currently earning his associate's degree from the Erie County Community College before he continues his education at Mercyhurst with a focus in paleontology. For him, the program really broadened his view on life after high school: "School doesn't really prepare you for [real life], they only tell you there's a few pathways to take when really there's thousands of them."

"Even if you know what you want to do, I think joining the program is a good way to get your foot in the door, to learn the things that you didn't learn in school," Anthony continued. "There are so many things you have to go through when you turn 18, and you have no clue how to do any of them because you're not prepared – this program helps prepare you for a lot of those things."

Future Focused Academy is participating in Erie Gives Day, on Tuesday, Aug. 12. Visit eriegives.org to make a donation.

Ally Kutz is a freelance writer and avid book reader who helps organize the Erie Reader Book Club. She can be reached at ally.kutz1@gmail.com.



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80 Years Since World War II: From Hitler's Rise to Hiroshima's End

Psychology behind the atrocities continues to fascinate

By: Jonathan Burdick

Eighty years ago, World War II ended. On Aug. 6, 1945, an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. On Aug. 15, Emperor Hirohito announced Japan's surrender, effectively ending the war. It was a violent and horrific conclusion to a violent and horrific war. The death toll of the previous six years was staggering, almost unfathomable. Estimates vary, but most experts suggest that somewhere between 50 to 80 million people died as a result of war. Tens of millions were civilians.

Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party's rise to power in Germany is the subject of countless books, articles, and documentaries, but continues to fascinate. The German population's embrace of and obedience towards Nazism did not take place overnight. The evolution of Hitler's cult of personality, his ascent to power, and Germany's fall to authoritarianism was a slow and often calculated process.

It was 1919, only a year after he was injured near the First World War's end, when Adolf Hitler joined Anton Drexler's German Workers' Party. In early 1920, now rebranded as the Nazi Party, Hitler demonstrated his oratory skills explaining their official platform to a crowd of 2,000. They emphasized a unification of German people across Europe, expanding territory, preventing immigration of non-Germans, and removing non-Germans from the Reich. "None but those of German blood, whatever their creed, may be members of the nation," the platform demanded.

In the United States, the Nazis remained relatively unknown. On Sept. 29, 1923, the Erie Daily Times mentioned Hitler for the first time. The photograph, unmistakably him, was printed alongside a caption: "Adolf Hitler, leader of the German National Socialist Party, German Fascist, which is gaining so much headway in Bavaria."

The Nazi's Beer Hall Putsch in Munich was two months later. This failed coup d'état resulted in a conviction of treason and a 5-year prison sentence for Hitler. The putsch and its "Hitlerites" were covered extensively in American papers, including in Erie, where it was referred to as a "tragic comedy" with Hitler mocked as a Don Quixote. Despite its failure though, it provided the Nazis something else of value: *visibility*. After nine months, Hitler was released.

In July 1925, Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was published. In it, he specified racial purity as his "sacred mission" and wrote that "racially pure people" would always "master over bastards." He also promoted the increasingly popular "stab-in-the-back" myth of World War I's end – that Germany hadn't lost the war on the battlefields, but by backstabbing communists, socialists, and Jews pulling political strings. The Nazis still remained very much a fringe group. In 1989, a *TIME Magazine* story reflected how Hitler initially only "attracted those like himself, unappeased outsiders, misfits, [and] losers." They were growing though and



These newspaper clippings from the Erie Daily Times in 1923 (left) and 1932 show Erie's documentation of the rise to power of Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party in Germany. This month marks 80 years since the end of World War II.



their appeal soon broadened. To spread their ideologies further, Hitler wrote, the Nazis had to understand "the emotional ideas of the great masses" and then present their ideas "through a psychologically correct form." He referred to propaganda as an "art" that must be skillfully mastered.

"[Propaganda] consists in attracting the attention of the crowd, and not in educating those who are already educated," Hitler wrote, adding that the "power of forgetting is enormous" among the great masses. "[A]ll effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan," he continued. "The function of propaganda ... is not to make an objective study of the truth ... its task is to serve our own right, always and unflinchingly."

In a later wartime psychological profile of Hitler, Walter C. Langer explained, "His primary rules were: never allow the public to cool off; never admit a fault or wrong; never concede that there may be some good in your enemy; never leave room for alternatives; never accept blame; concentrate on one enemy at a time and blame him for everything that goes wrong; people will believe a big lie sooner than a little one; and if you repeat it frequently enough people will sooner or later believe it."

He also learned from his mistakes. The putsch had failed. As explained by Holocaust historian

Christopher R. Browning, "The Nazis would use the electoral process of democracy to destroy democracy." Propaganda was key and their propaganda machine was extremely effective especially as economic chaos increasingly destabilized Germany. Moderate German politicians and intellectuals, who had somewhat embraced post-war democratic reforms, attempted to hold onto the center, but polarization was widening at an alarming rate.

Meanwhile, back in Erie, years passed without a single mention of Hitler or the Nazis in local newspapers. The spread of Nazism was not yet something on most people's minds stateside, although there were plenty of articles about Benito Mussolini's fascist movement in Italy. After all, in Germany's 1928 federal elections, the Nazi Party only received 2.63 percent of the vote, giving the Nazis only 12 seats in a nearly 500-member Reichstag. By 1930 though, that increased to almost 20 percent, the second most of any party. In the Erie Daily Times, this put the Nazis back in the headlines. That September, they ran a story claiming that the Nazis planned to overthrow the republic with an army of streetfighters and storm divisions. Hitler denied claims that they were anything but peaceful.

"Adolf Hitler, bold man of German politics and head of the Fascists, unflinchingly ... proclaimed without hesitation that Fascism through *peaceful* means eventually was fated to conquer the nation," a report a few days later said. In a 1931 interview though,

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- **NWPA Beehive Network**, with ECGRA support and matching funds from the Friends, offers a chance to create and nurture a business idea.
- **Erie Makes** is a weeklong celebration of maker skills and local artists with fun, all-ages programming.
- The **Career Online High School** offers an opportunity to gain a high school diploma needed for career development and further education.
- **HistERIE Week** with dozens of programs, help people connect to regional history and genealogy.
- **Small Business Symposium** provides vital information on how to start a small business including finances, accounting, intellectual property, and how to get a small business loan.
- **Computer, Genealogy, Yoga and Craft** Classes
- **Book Clubs** and **Reading Challenges**

YOUTH PROGRAMS

- **STEAM** (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) Programs.
- **Book Clubs** for early readers through teens.
- **Reading Challenges** like "Color Our World", combining reading, art topics, and music with fun family activities in the Summer Reading Program.
- **Storytimes and craft** programs.
- **Civic Literacy Education** helps youth learn about our elections system in a fun way.
- **Teen Space** with activities designed with input from older youth.
- **Teen Advisory Board.**
- **Pokémon League, Chess Club, Block Party, Building Buddies Brigade and Wee Build Block Party.**



OUTREACH PROGRAMS

- **Outreach efforts** at schools (STEAM Nights, family engagement activities, and classroom visits) and community events.
- **Program materials** for the Bookmobile.
- **2025 special events** include the **Earth Day Extravaganza**, multiple school outreach visits, **National Night Out** and partnerships with organizations in the region.
- **Advertising and marketing materials** to raise library awareness, promote programs and connect patrons to library resources.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- **Continuing Education** at American Library Association and PA Library Association and other conferences.
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Hitler hinted otherwise, stating, “I will tolerate no opposition. We recognize only subordination.”

“The German problem cannot be laughed off,” the Erie Daily Times editorialized. “Adolf Hitler [is] a stronger character than ever before and a force to be reckoned with in the near future.” Only President Paul von Hindenburg, it was argued, remained as “the key-stone in the conservative dam which is holding back the flood of radical and Fascist opinion” in Germany.

In January 1933, Hindenburg appointed Hitler as Reich Chancellor. The Reichstag was set on fire in late February, which the Nazis used as evidence of a communist conspiracy. On March 5, the Nazis received nearly 44 percent of the vote in the elections, making them Germany’s leading party. Hitler immediately began shattering democratic norms and by the end of the month was handed dictatorial powers by the Reichstag with the passage of the Enabling Act. Then in August 1934, following the death of the 86-year-old Hindenburg, Hitler merged the offices of chancellor and president to become *Führer*.

Despite early criticism from world leaders, Hitler asserted there were “no persecutions” of Jews living in Germany and “not a hair on their heads has been touched.” In fact, he countered, his stormtroopers were even putting their lives on the line to *protect* Jewish people and property. Such accusations by the United States, he said, were simply “atrocious propaganda.” Regardless, added Hitler, Americans had “the least reason to protest, since it first recognized the different values of races” and continued to enforce their own discriminatory Jim Crow laws.

Hitler mastered playing the victim. “The world is persecuting us, it is turning against us, it does not wish to recognize our right to live, does not want to admit that we have a right to protect our homeland,” he claimed.

“[Hitler] is the martyr, the victim, Prometheus chained to the rock, the self-sacrificing hero who fights single-handed against impossible odds,” quipped British author George Orwell. “If he were killing a mouse he would know how to make it seem like a dragon.”

A year later, the editors of the Erie Daily Times called it an “instructive coincidence” that President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Hitler had completed their first year in office on almost the same day. They contrasted the ways in which each leader met the national emergencies of economic turmoil, stating that while we had the New Deal, Germany had Nazi control.

“To put it more simply, the Germans have sacrificed the last vestiges of their individual liberty to meet a great crisis,” they wrote. “We have met our crisis with our liberties unimpaired. ... If we wish to preserve our happiness, we must preserve our democracy.”

As Germany began rearming, journalist H.R. Knickerbocker, who’d reported from Berlin for a decade before Hitler’s rise, wrote that there were nine million German boys and men being convinced that they *must* experience the glory of war. “They, the youth of Germany, want to live and die as heroes, not as common men,” wrote Knickerbocker. “They

believe, and the entire German nation is taught today, that the Germans are a race of lords destined to rule.” The Nazification of Germany’s youth was already underway. Obedience towards and devotion to the Führer was central to this indoctrination.

Over the next five years, there were over a thousand articles published in the Erie Daily Times about Hitler and Nazi Germany. It was very much on people’s minds when, in September 1939, Germany invaded Poland. The Erie Daily Times editors condemned the “power-intoxicated, arrogant” Hitler for “emulating his mad predecessors” in what they predicted would be “the bloodiest [war] of all time. “Hitler will not rule Europe. He will join the company of others who sought, by tyranny, to rule free men,” they added.

In Poland, the atrocities were immediate. Mobile killing squads deployed into towns and villages, massacring civilian populations. These massacres were committed not merely by zealous Nazis, but by previously ordinary, working-class German men who’d been drafted. Most had previously never taken a human life, let alone those of women, children, and the elderly. Despite this, they overwhelmingly complied with their orders, even one group of 500 men who were told that they could opt out if it was too difficult for them. Only 12 accepted.

Many observers grappled with how a country such as Germany could pivot to such viciousness and outright barbarianism. If in similar circumstances, were we *all* capable of such acts? Writing in 1941, months before the U.S. entered the war, American journalist Dorothy Thompson explained her “macabre parlor game” of speculating who would and would not “go Nazi” among her acquaintances.

“By now, I think I know. I have come to know the types,” she wrote. “And I also know those who never, under any conceivable circumstances, would become Nazis. Kind, good, happy, gentlemanly, secure people never go Nazi. [T]he frustrated and humiliated intellectual, the rich and scared speculator, the spoiled son, the labor tyrant, the fellow who has achieved success by smelling out the wind of success – they would all go Nazi in a crisis.”

For the next six years, World War II raged violently and cruelly and mercilessly on multiple fronts across multiple continents. Previously unimaginable savagery was unleashed upon the world. By May 1945, the Battle of Berlin had been underway for two weeks. Germans in Italy had surrendered. The Erie Daily Times published a graphic front page image of Benito Mussolini and his mistress Clara Petacci, dead, their lifeless bodies hanging upside down from the girders of a gas station. It was also speculated that Hitler was already dead. German Field Marshall Karl Von Rundstedt, captured only days earlier, said that, yes, he knew Hitler was dead, but it couldn’t have been suicide like some speculated. He *certainly* died heroically fighting the Allied forces. But he had not. Hitler had killed his dog and shot himself in the head in his Berlin bunker alongside his poisoned girlfriend Eva Braun.

“For the last few weeks, no Germans with whom I talked cared where Hitler was,” one American war re-

porter wrote. “They didn’t care whether he was dead or alive.”

Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945. In Erie, there were no celebrations, no parades. Downtown businesses closed for the day. A few work whistles went off, but mostly it was silent and solemn as people entered neighborhood churches teary-eyed. “There was no shouting, boisterousness or wild cheering,” the newspaper recounted. One police officer noted, “There’s nothing to celebrate yet.” The war with Japan remained.

Within a few days, reports trickled in detailing what soldiers were witnessing while liberating concentration and death camps, “beyond power of words to describe” with “the same pattern of death by hard labor, starvation, disease, brutality, gas chambers, [and] filthy and unsanitary conditions.”

“[Hitler’s plans have] ended for conquering the world for the Aryan race ... he sought to build while enslaving the rest of the world,” the Erie Daily Times noted.

On the Pacific Front, after 80 days of fighting, the Battle of Okinawa ended. There were over 12,000 American and 100,000 Japanese combat deaths – and at least another 100,000 civilian deaths. Then in August 1945, the war then ended as it began – with extreme violence and horror. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were leveled by atomic bombs. By many estimates, over 200,000 were killed by these two single bombs, mostly civilians and including tens of thousands of children.

“Now we are given a new source of anguish,” writer and French Resistance member Albert Camus wrote. “[I]t has all the promise of being our greatest anguish ever.”

The human cost of World War II cannot be overstated. Locally in Erie, the newspaper reported a total of 13,859 local men and 262 women served. National Archive records list around 300 Erie County and 150 Crawford County servicemen who died. Over 400,000 Americans perished in total.

Fascination over how and why so many followed Adolf Hitler remains. The scholarship is well documented. Psychiatrist Carl Jung called him a “medicine man, a spiritual vessel, a demi-deity or, even better, a myth” whose actions were “illogical, inexplicable, and unreasonable.” Whatever the case, Germany’s slide towards Nazi authoritarianism crept. It spread slowly.

“Nazism itself was a religion,” explains historian Geoffrey Blainey, “and Hitler was its high priest.”

Following the Nuremberg Trials, American psychologist Gustave Gilbert, who spent considerable time with the Nazi prisoners, wrote of his search for the nature of evil. “I think I’ve come close to defining it: a lack of empathy. A genuine incapacity to feel with their fellow man,” Gilbert concluded. “Evil, I think, is the absence of empathy.”

There are a number of local historical societies participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. Consider donating to one in your municipality. Visit eriegives.org

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

Erie Reader Gives 2025

Support the foundations of community with the Erie Community Foundation

By: Erie Reader Staff

TUESDAY, AUG. 12

The Erie Community Foundation has been working hard all year long for this day, Erie Gives Day 2025, which happens to mark their 15th. For 15 years, this transformational day of giving locally has been helping to bolster the donations of thousands of Erieites (and beyond) to help make the most of our gifts and give hundreds of nonprofits unrestricted funding to help keep them afloat or expand their reach. For 15 years, the folks at the Erie Community Foundation have been honing the process and learning how to make it more beneficial, easier, and more streamlined for the community.

If you're new to Erie Gives this year, the basic idea is that on Tuesday, Aug. 12, you visit eriegives.org (or make donations in person or by check. The Erie Community Foundation offices are located at 459 W. Sixth St.), choose your favorite nonprofits using the search bar at the top, and make your donations. Your \$25 donation (or more) will then receive a prorated Bonus Bucks match from the Erie Community Foundation Bonus Bucks pool, which basically makes your donation bigger and more impactful to your nonprofit.

And this year, it's easier than ever to give and give big. Like last year, Erie Gives will be online for 24 hours, offering a much larger gift-giving window than in previous years. This proved extremely effective last year when Erie Gives Day brought in their biggest payload yet, raising over \$9.7 million for 513 participating nonprofits.

One major added benefit this year is that there are NO FEES attached to your donation. Vice President of Marketing and Community Relations Erin Fessler explains, "What is exciting about this year's Erie Gives is our Bonus Buck pool is the largest in our 15-year history as community partners provided over \$634,000 to support Erie Gives. What that means is the Bonus Bucks will cover all fees, and what remains will be prorated and given to the 500-plus participating nonprofits."

At this moment in history, when federal funding sources are being restricted or eliminated, supporting our local nonprofits is more important than ever. These organizations represent what community really is: helping each other out. Whether that's through LGBTQIA+ support, social justice organizations, immigrant support services, feeding ministries, environmental groups, public media, or those foundations supporting our artists and musicians – all of these nonprofits make our quality of life in Erie better. Kailey Pisani, marketing and communications associate shares, "Erie Gives Day gives marginalized groups the support, visibility, and affirmation they deserve. There's something powerful about seeing your community invest in you, believe in your future, and embrace you as a vital part of the whole. It also



The Erie Community Foundations hosts their 15th annual Erie Gives Day this year on Tuesday, Aug. 12 from midnight to midnight. Expanded hours, no cumbersome fees, and the biggest matching pool yet all spell success for Erie's most impactful nonprofit organizations.

sends a strong message that The Erie Community Foundation is committed to representing and uplifting everyone in our region. It reaffirms our mission to build a united, vibrant, and thriving community for all."

Our Nonprofit Picks

Each year, the Erie Reader polls our editors, writers, and staff to highlight the nonprofits they plan to support this Erie Gives Day. Below you'll find our varied results that really goes to show the diversity of nonprofits making an impact in our community. If you're having trouble deciding which nonprofit to support this Erie Gives Day, we hope you can draw inspiration from the following list. Let's get giving, Erie!

Nonprofits are listed alphabetically by donor's last name

Eagle's Nest Leadership Corporation (ENLC)

Who's giving: Liz Allen, Contributing Writer

Who they are: ENLC offers a variety of educational programs for at-risk youth, including the Eagle's Nest School of Academic Distinction, for

kindergarten through third grade and sixth through eighth grade students.

Why I'm giving: I volunteered to read to second-grade classrooms at the Eagle's Nest this past year. Every week, I learned something new from the children and I was always impressed by Jenn Rose, their teacher, Jane Ross, their teacher's aide, and the way the kids tackled their lessons and modeled good behavior. Looking forward to catching up with them in third grade!

Liz previously gave to: Emmaus Ministries, The Harry T. Burleigh Legacy Alliance, Urban Erie Community Development Corp (UECDC), All Aboard Erie, and the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network

Performing Artists Collective Alliance (PACA)

Who's giving: Edwina Capozziello, Contributing Writer

Who they are: Erie's creative mecca in the historic Mayer building, with live community theater for adults and children (new home of Footlights), studio and gallery space for multiple mediums, all in a diverse and welcoming environment that seeks to empower the community through the arts.

Why I'm giving: PACA is dedicated to keeping Erie's creative spirit alive and right now donations are being matched by philanthropist Tom Hagen (up to \$500,000) toward renovation and expansion. I'm hopeful that once all of the updates are complete that Dave Schroeder's PACA[LIVE!] music series can be reborn.

Edwina previously gave to: U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants-USCRI

Bonus: Support local performing arts through gifts to the Erie Playhouse or Dafmark Creative Arts Center.

Boro Women & Family Services

Who's giving: Julia Carden, Contributing Writer

Who they are: Boro Women & Family Services is a nonprofit organization that provides free, confidential services to support and empower individuals and families. Through education and access to health and wellness resources, the organization helps people make informed decisions that lead to healthier, more secure lives.

Why I'm giving: I support Boro Women & Family Services because I believe in meeting people where they are. This organization provides something special: free, confidential services without the red tape of insurance or the stress of a formal clinical setting. They run diaper drives, keep a stocked community resource room, and create a space where folks feel seen and supported. I've seen firsthand the difference this group makes for residents and college students in need of support. And in a time of growing barriers to women's health services, community-based organizations like Boro Women & Family Services matter more than ever.

Bonus: Consider other family service organizations like SafeNet Erie, Perseus House, or Safe Journey.

expERIENCE Children's Museum



Who's giving: Nathaniel Clark, Contributing Writer
Who they are: The expERIENCE Children's Museum is a place that has been inspiring creativity and imagination in children for over 25 years. The museum's primary mission is to engage children, families, and community members from diverse backgrounds in play-based educational experiences that foster creativity, exploration, and imagination. With a variety of exhibitions and activities, toddlers to teens have the opportunity to foster mindsets that they

will carry with them far into their years.

Why I'm giving: As an Erie native since childhood, I have fond memories of my field trips and family explorations of expERIENCE's original location: playing around in their detailed spaces provided me with crucial experiences along with joy during my time spent there. Now, as an adult, I want to give back to the people who are working toward continuing the museum's mission for the next generation.

McKean Hose Co.

Who's giving: Chloe Forbes, Contributing Writer

Who they are: The McKean Hose Company is a fire department dedicated to serving McKean and surrounding communities in Erie County since 1941. They assist in a variety of calls and are tireless advocates, providing outreach education and finding new solutions whenever possible to keep people safe.

Why I'm giving: My grandfather, Neal Williams, was a firefighter in McKean, and right now, fire departments and first responders need the critical support of their communities to continue their life-saving work. Nobody should ever have to question if their fire department will be able to make it to them in an emergency. Consider giving to your local fire department on Erie Gives to get immediate feet on the ground when it's most critical!

Chloe previously gave to: Goodell Gardens & Homestead

Bonus: Search eriegives.org in the Emergency Response category to find the volunteer fire department closest to you.

Groundwork Erie



Who's giving: Gretchen Gallagher Durney, Contributing Writer

Who they are: The organization is focused on urban agriculture, place-making, and community resilience. Their Green Team program hires and trains young people, empowering them and caring for neighborhoods in the city via a structured and supportive personal development program.

Why I'm giving: I love Groundwork's focus on our youth, care for city green spaces, and the tie into access to local food with the Pay What You Can Farmers Markets. The Green Team specifically hones in on strengthening young people ages 14-18 and their neighborhoods within the city, both vital

initiatives. Developing young leaders while they earn some green and make the city more green, beautiful, and resilient? Truly a win-win! Their stats are impressive over just the start of this season. According to executive director Erin Carey (40 Under 40 Class of 2025), 24 teens were hired, nearly 800 urban trees cared for, more than 15 acres of land in the city maintained and beautified, more than 500 pounds of trash removed, and hundreds of pounds of local produce (some of which they grew at their own East Fourth Street Community Farm) distributed at the Pay What You Can Markets which they help facilitate.

I'm excited to see their reach expand as they help cultivate resilient young leaders and make a direct impact on our community. Want your funds to be designated for the Green Team? The Pay What You Can Stand? Just say so when you give on the 12th!

Because You Care / Purrista Cat Cafe



Who's giving: Brian Graham, Editor/Publisher

Who they are: Because You Care is a local nonprofit that helps rescue and rehome animals in need. They do an amazing job making sure pets are cared for in foster homes while they wait for the right match. Purrista Cat Cafe partners with them by housing some of their adoptable cats. You can grab a coffee, hang out with the cats, and maybe even fall in love with one. It's a great setup for animals and people alike.

Why I am giving: For this year's nonprofit, I'm once again choosing Because You Care. We adopted our second pet from them this past winter, after first adopting our beagle, Slim, back in 2016. This time, it was a cat named Barbie. We first met Barbie at Purrista Cat Cafe, where she was part of a crew of cats living at Purrista through a partnership with Because You Care.

Barbie had already made a name for herself online as the "extra-spicy" cat with the grumpy face and quick swat for anyone who didn't respect her boundaries. Naturally, my daughter fell head over heels. She made it her mission to get Barbie to like her. Almost every day, she would beg me to take her to Purrista, and the moment we walked in, Barbie would stretch, wake from her nap, and start playing like a tiny maniac, especially if there was a laser pointer involved. After a few visits, my daughter's begging escalated. She wanted to adopt Barbie.

After a lot of convincing (and some impressive behavior on her part), we finally gave in. Luckily, a generous donor had already covered Barbie's adoption fees. She had been waiting for a forever home for quite a while, so at \$0, she was quite a bargain. Barbie settled in quickly. She's playful, quirky, affectionate, and even tolerates her older beagle brother, though she will happily steal his favorite spot on the couch. Because You Care and Purrista Cat Cafe have brought so much joy to our lives. I can't recommend them enough to any animal lovers out there.

Brian previously gave to: Erie Cancer Wellness Center, United Way Imagination Library, Friends of the Erie County Library, Meals on Wheels, Hooked on Books, and YMCA of Greater Erie

Bonus: Consider donating to any of Erie's myriad of animal shelters like the ANNA Shelter, the Erie Humane Society, or the Erie Animal Network.

WQLN/PBS/NPR



Who's giving: Jessica Hunter, Media Editor/Photographer

Who they are: WQLN is Erie's home for public radio, public television, and lifelong learning. WQLN has been a constant in our region for nearly 60 years – an educational and cultural lifeline that informs, entertains, and inspires. From *Sesame Street* and *Fresh Air* to locally produced programs that elevate regional voices, WQLN enriches our lives in countless quiet ways. But recent federal funding cuts have left a serious gap.

Why I am giving: I'm giving to WQLN because I believe in free, accessible public media. I believe in the kid watching *PBS Kids* before school. I believe in the car radio that makes a commute more thoughtful. I believe in the local documentary that helps us see our own city with new eyes. I believe in the Erie-based station that doesn't just broadcast content, but reflects the values, creativity, and curiosity of our community. WQLN needs to recover critical lost funding in order to keep public media strong for generations to come. Because while the dollars matter, so does the message: we care about the stories that bring us together.

Jessica previously gave to: Erie Yacht Club Foundation, Presque Isle Partnership, Lake Erie Region Conservancy, Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, NAMI of Erie County, and the Erie Humane Society

Emmaus Ministries



Who's giving: Erin Phillips, Managing Editor

Who they are: (Literally) serving Erie since 1974 when they opened their very first soup kitchen, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie have been operating and expanding Emmaus Ministries ever since. Now running the Emmaus Soup Kitchen and food pantry, the Kids Cafe after-school program, the Studio at St. Mary's: Space to Create, Emmaus Grove: The Erie Urban Farm School, and the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House (who hosts their own Erie Gives drive), Emmaus feeds the minds, bodies, and souls of those in Erie who need it most.

Why I'm giving: Over the past year or so, I have learned that nuns these days are absolutely RADICAL. No longer the staunch, habit-wearing, ruler-yielding sisters of old, these ladies are organizing protests, leading political movements, and leaning into community service through their continued feeding ministries. Emmaus provides meals and fresh produce (grown hyper-locally at their urban garden, Emmaus Grove) to anyone in need without question or judgment, and provides safe places for our city's children to go where they will be supported, nurtured, fed, and given the opportunity to be creative, learn, and grow.

Erin previously gave to: The Erie Bird Observatory, Friends of the Erie County Library, Erie Arts & Culture, Asbury Woods, and Our West Bayfront

The Multicultural Community Resource Center

Who's giving: Dan Schank, Contributing Writer

Who they are: For a half century, the MCRC has prepared our New American population in Erie for success. They provide language services, child care, job placement resources, and diversity training to some of our newest Erieites.

Why I'm giving: It's a tough time to be arriving in the United States, with an astonishing variety of services disappearing and xenophobia on the rise. But immigrants strengthen our city through their creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. The MCRC makes their transition into our communities much smoother – especially for people fleeing dangerous environments. I want to live in an Erie that is multicultural and welcoming, rather than one that is re-

active and provincial.

Dan previously gave to: Compton's Table, NWPA Pride Alliance, Inc., and The Erie County Community College of PA

Bonus: Other immigrant outreach nonprofits include USCRI and the Bhutanese Community Association of Erie.

Community Access Media

Who's giving: Adam Welsh, Editor/Publisher

Who they are: You may know them best for their reliable coverage of City Council meetings, Jefferson Educational Society programs, or the live music of Celebrate Erie and Erie's Blues and Jazz Festival, but since 1997 Community Access Media (CAM) has been empowering the Erie community by providing the tools and training to produce and broadcast their own media. Authorized by the City of Erie to administer the public access channel on Spectrum Cable channel 1021 and VNET Fiber channel 2, CAM's mission is to facilitate community involvement in media that benefits our region. Beyond cable television, they've expanded to include podcasts, YouTube videos, and social media content, ensuring that local voices and visions have a platform to reach a wide audience.

“Erie Gives Day gives marginalized groups the support, visibility, and affirmation they deserve. There's something powerful about seeing your community invest in you, believe in your future, and embrace you as a vital part of the whole.”
– Kailey Pisani, marketing and communications associate with the Erie Community Foundation

Why I'm giving: Like the Erie Reader, CAM is a staple of our local media landscape and provides an important window into our community. At a time when crucial local media is increasingly being consolidated and defunded while a handful of large corporations dictate the conversation, CAM provides a vital counterbalance. They not only offer a platform for a diverse range of local voices from nonprofits to individual content creators, but they also provide the hands-on training and equipment needed to turn an idea into a reality. CAM fosters civic engagement and empowers citizens to tell their own stories. They don't just give people a microphone, they also teach them how to use it. In my view, that's an invaluable service for our community.

Adam previously gave to: Career and Dreams, Erie Women's Fund, Film Society of Northwest Pennsylvania, Lake Erie Region Conservancy, LifeThruMusic, the Jefferson Educational Society, and the Presque Isle Partnership

Visit eriegives.org from 12 a.m. to 12 a.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 12 to donate.



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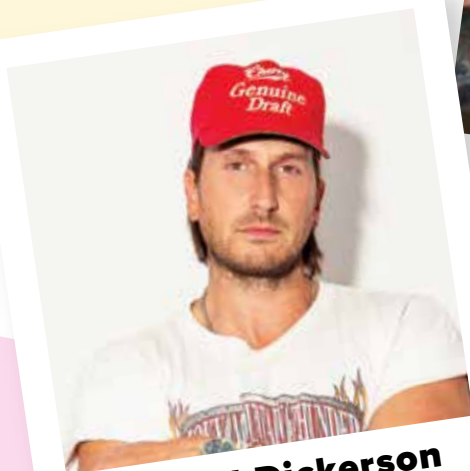
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sunday august 17

Can You Beat the Beast?

Barber National Institute hosts 12th and final Beast on the Bay

By: Cassandra Gripp

The Barber National Institute (BNI) is an organization dedicated to making dreams come true. Founded in 1952 by the late Dr. Gertrude Barber, BNI has celebrated over 70 years of providing educational services, day programs, housing opportunities, and hope to adults and children with autism, behavioral challenges, and developmental and intellectual disabilities across Pennsylvania.

On Saturday, Sept. 6, BNI will be hosting their 12th and final Barber Beast on the Bay fundraiser. This rigorous obstacle course stretches across 10 miles of Erie's beloved Presque Isle State Park. Described as "no walk in the park," this course includes over 30 obstacles meant to test one's strength, endurance, cooperation, and mental prowess – all while supporting a fundraiser meant to help others overcome their own challenges daily.

In addition to BNI's overarching mis-

sion, the company values respect for all people, integrity, quality and excellence, teamwork, and compassion. While traversing the Barber Beast on the Bay, these same values can be exercised by competitors and onlookers alike.

Since its first year, the Beast has transformed into a Herculean experience, drawing newcomers and veteran generations of families and friends. It has received several accolades, including All-Star Destination Partner in *SportsEvents Magazine*, 11 Best of Erie Awards for Best Athletic Competition, and also received national recognition as USA Today's Best Pennsylvania Attraction.

With an expected 1,300 participants this year alone, the Beast Builders, an important team behind the scenes dedicated to ensuring the course is engineered properly and meets safety regulations, have combined many crowd favorites with new obstacles to



This year's 12th annual Barber Beast on the Bay ninja-warrior style competition, 11-time winner of Best of Erie's Best Athletic Competition, will mark their last as they reimagine their annual fundraiser to better suit the mission of the organization.

bring this course to a close. Director of Strategic Communications Tammy Roche commented, "Without their hard work, creativity, and technical skills, it would not be possible."

The Beast requires one to run (or walk), jump, climb, and crawl across 10 miles of beach trails, swamplands, waterways, and more. Some of these obstacles include Armageddon, the

40-foot Wall, Jailbreak, and the Tail of the Beast, all challenges meant to test one's upper body strength.

Many challenges testing balance (Walk the Plank, Stairway to Heaven, Pallet Peril), speed (Quarter Pipe, Heartbreak Hill), strategy (Roadkill, Teeter Totter), and dexterity (Charlotte's Revenge) have also been included in this year's listing.

On August 12th, please consider donating to CCCAS on Erie Gives Day!



Your donation will allow is to continue our mission of providing professional counseling, adoption services, and other programs to educate, affirm and support individuals of all faiths to achieve their fullest human potential.

- Emergency Financial Assistance
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- Drug and Alcohol Services
- Adoption / Permanency Services
- Refugee Resettlement Program



From mud to maze to monkey bars to moving water, whether you're an experienced competitor or a newcomer, the course offers something for everyone.

For those thinking of joining the challenge, Roche offered some sound advice to first-timers: "One of the comments we receive the most at the finish line is how difficult it is to run in the sand. I'd recommend practicing running and walking on the sand now in whatever shoes you plan to wear."

The Barber Beast on the Bay's goal is to help people of all abilities overcome whatever personal challenges they face. Whether it's recovery from an illness, in memory of someone who passed, or even just an opportunity to set a personal best for yourself, the event is there to share those special moments with you. "One of the most rewarding experiences to witness," Roche shares, "is to see the sheer joy on their faces as they cross the finish line – the tears, the yelling – it's very full of uplifting moments."

As a companion to the Beast, a 1-mile adapted course will be available to those aged 12 and up with physical or intellectual disabilities at Waldameer Park and Water World. Accommodations have been made to fit specific needs and the obstacles can be completed whether the participant is ambulatory, using a walker, or in a wheelchair.

In its current state, the adapted course takes place over the paved roads of Waldameer Park and offers 15 optional obstacles that require pulling, carrying, and navigating ramps. "Course buddies," or able-bodied volunteers, will be made available to assist those who require them.

Together, the 10-mile and 1-mile courses will converge at Water World's wave pool for an epic conclusion to the day's trials.

There, prizes will be handed out and spread over a series of categories similar to the registration options or "waves" given to all incoming participants: awards dedicated to the Elite Wave, Timed Wave, Non-Timed Wave, Teams, and Top Fundraisers. Prizes will also be administered to those placing first, second, and third.

After completing the obstacle course, participants and guests alike are welcome to join a parking lot party featuring live music, food trucks, ice-cold refreshments, photo walls, and merchandise trucks.

BNI's senior vice president Robert Barber said: "Over the years, more than 13,000 people have participated and raised over \$830,000 for Barber National Institute. We are proud of what Barber Beast on the Bay has accomplished and have made the thoughtful decision to conclude the event at its peak. We are so grateful to the participants, volunteers, sponsors and community partners, especially our obstacle builders."

The Barber Beast on the Bay 2025 will mark the end of an era, allowing focus to shift to the 1-mile Adapted Course instead. Organizers have expressed that new information regarding the "reimagined" course will be coming at a later date. "We wanted

With an expected 1,300 participants this year alone, the Beast Builders, an important team behind the scenes dedicated to ensuring the course is engineered properly and meets safety regulations, have combined many crowd favorites with new obstacles to bring this course to a close

to go out on a high note," Roche said. "This will be more in line with what our company has set out to do."

Barber echoed this sentiment: "While the Beast on the Bay is coming to an end, our commitment to supporting individuals with disabilities is unwavering. We will continue to channel our resources into innovative programs and services that create opportunities and transform lives. We encourage our community to stay involved at Barber National Institute in other meaningful ways – through volunteering, giving, or advocating for inclusion."

For more information, registration, cost, and info visit: barberbeast.org

The Barber National Institute is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. To donate visit eriegives.org

Cassandra Gripp is a freelance writer and editor always up for the challenge. She can be reached at cassie.gripp@gmail.com.



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EVENTS

Music and Nature Come Together at 2025's Frontier Friday Concert Series

Presented by LEAF (Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park)

CONTINUING FRIDAY, AUG. 8

LEAF, the Erie-based non-profit dedicated to fostering nature, education, and community at Frontier Park, has announced the return of its Frontier Friday Concert Series for what's left of summer 2025. Sponsored by Volvo Cars Erie, a fresh lineup of bands and solo artists will play every Friday from Aug. 8 through Oct. 3, with one well-timed break on Aug. 15 to accommodate Celebrate Erie festivities. This year's line-up includes local acts such as Jess Royer, This American Song, and Matt Texter.

"Frontier Fridays were inspired by our long-standing tradition of celebrating music and community in the park," says Executive Director Erin Green. "Since 2001, we have hosted Arts in the Arboretum each August at the Patricia McCain Outdoor Amphitheater, bringing people together for live performances in a beautiful outdoor setting. After a short hiatus,

we wanted to bring that spirit back with a fresh take. Frontier Fridays continue that legacy with an updated vibe that highlights local talent, food, and connection, all while celebrating the natural beauty of Frontier Park."

The music begins each Friday evening at 6 p.m. at the amphitheater. Beyond the performances themselves, attendees can expect a rotating selection of food and drink vendors, with treats to suit every taste. Weekly vendor announcements will be shared on LEAF's social media.

"LEAF's mission is to create educational opportunities and outdoor experiences for our community," says Community Outreach Manager Claire Ciezki. "Frontier Fridays does exactly that by bringing people outdoors to enjoy time among the trees while supporting unique local musicians and food trucks. Donations are accepted during the event and will go towards LEAF programming and the local band of the night." – Aaron Mook



Don't bid farewell to summer just yet! The folks at LEAF are just getting started with their free Frontier Friday music series – bringing a local, original music act to their amphitheater each Friday through October 3.

Fridays at 6 p.m., Aug. 8 - Oct. 3 // LEAF Amphitheater, 1501 W. 6th St. // Free // leaferie.org

Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier - LEAF is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. To donate, visit eriegives.org

Much Ado, Mafia-Style

Shakespeare's beloved comedy gets a modern twist at Goodell Gardens

BEGINNING FRIDAY, AUG. 8

Meadville Community Theatre is bringing an inventive production of William Shakespeare's classic *Much Ado About Nothing* to the outdoor setting of Goodell Gardens & Homestead in Edinboro.

The enduring comedy *Much Ado* centers on the lively world of Messina, where a group of friends return from war and soon find themselves entangled in a series of romantic misadventures. Full of mistaken identities, clever wordplay, and heartfelt reconciliation, the play explores themes of love and the humorous follies of human nature.

"*Much Ado About Nothing* is the original rom-com," Sylvia Cagle, play director said. "Anytime you see a story where two people can't stand each other but end up falling in love after being set up, that's the plot. It's timeless, and it's hilarious."

Theater companies often put their own twists on classics like *Much Ado*, and this production is no exception. This adaptation places the characters in a 1990s mafia family. With this

creative framing, the company leans into both the humor and heart of Shakespeare's script, making it more accessible and digestible for modern audiences.

The cast features 17 local actors and actresses who, with the support of dramaturg Jim Bulman, approach the script with care and intention.

"*Much Ado About Nothing* is the original rom-com. Anytime you see a story where two people can't stand each other but end up falling in love after being set up, that's the plot. It's timeless, and it's hilarious." – Sylvia Cagle, director

Meadville Community Theatre will present three special performances outdoors at Goodell, offering audiences a unique opportunity to enjoy Shakespeare in a natural setting. Known for staging environmental shows outside the walls of traditional theaters, the company invites the audience to experience the play in a space that enhances the story's charm.



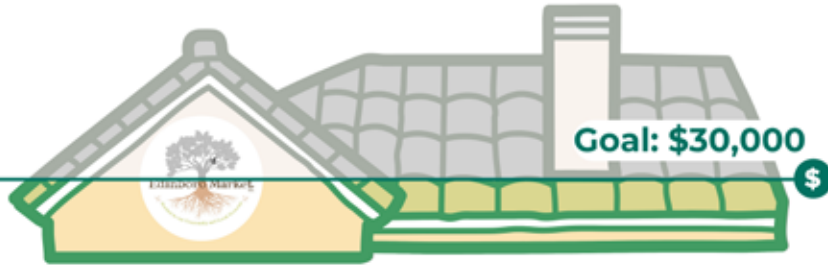
Bringing the bard to the barn, so to speak, the folks from Meadville Community Theatre are presenting the Shakespearean comedy in a modern light on the grounds of the beautiful Goodell Gardens and Homestead in Edinboro.

"I just want viewers to have a good time," Cagle said. "We hope everyone can forget their troubles and enjoy an evening in this beautiful setting." – Julia Carden

Aug. 8 and 9 at 6 p.m., Sunday, Aug. 10 at 2 p.m. // Goodell Gardens & Homestead, 221 Waterford St., Edinboro // \$20-\$30 // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com

Goodell Gardens and Homestead is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. To donate visit: eriegives.org

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Pride Block Party Celebrates Joy, Wellness, and Intersectionality

The Perry Square event will focus on community care and uplift Black and Brown voices

SATURDAY, AUG. 9

Downtown Erie will come alive as Erie Pride 365 hosts the Pride Block Party in Perry Square. In collaboration with Compton's Table and Erie's Black Wall Street, this free, family-friendly event will be a chance for Black and Brown

LGBTQIA+ voices to be publicly uplifted.

"We're creating a space where people feel safe, seen, and celebrated," says organizer Dalen Hooks, who co-founded Pittsburgh Pride before returning to Erie to open Central Outreach Erie. The 2025 40 Under 40

honoree explained, "My hope is that people leave this event not just joyful, but empowered – knowing they matter, and that justice and joy can coexist."

The musical headliner will be Pittsburgh's Money Mook Dawg, a trans rapper who recently graced the main stage of Pittsburgh Pride. His vibrant visuals blend with a fearless lyricism making for energetic multimedia performances. Erie's own Brittany Morton will provide a soulful set, preceded by HomeboyMusic, and a bass-heavy backdrop by DJ Jaden2Waavy. The legendary Shea D'Heaux and Fasha Doll will also light up the stage during Drag Hour.

The day will feature two interactive stretch workshops from Erie Arts & Culture, as well as on-site wellness resources (including HIV/STI testing and PrEP education) courtesy of Central Outreach Erie. It will also see the debut of the Erie Pride 365's Stamp of Approval, recognizing local

organizations who have completed S.O.G.I.E. (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Expression) and People & Belonging training.

Erie Gay News and the Erie County Human Relations Commission will have booths set up, in addition to many businesses featuring LGBTQ+ owners.

"Erie Pride 365 isn't just about identity – it's about liberation, joy, and access" noted Hooks. "By blending visibility with public health awareness, the block party reflects the belief that Pride should be inclusive, affirming, and healing for everyone." – Nick Warren

Noon to 8 p.m. // Perry Square, Downtown Erie // Free // All Ages // For more information, visit eriepride.org

Erie Pride 365 and Erie's Black Wall Street are both participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. To donate visit eriegives.org



Erie Pride 365 will be hosting their second annual Pride Block Party in Perry Square. Organizer Dalen Hooks (40 Under 40 Class of 2025) of Central Outreach shares that this free, family event will be a chance for Black and Brown queer voices to be uplifted.

Produce to the People

Pay What You Can Stands deepening connections and abundance

CONTINUING MONDAY, AUG. 11

Tis the season for a cornucopia of freshly grown goodies in our corner of Pennsylvania. If folks miss the biweekly LEAF market or the weekly Little Italy Farmers Market there is another option available nearly every day of the week for fresh, local produce at the Pay What You Can Stands.

Launched in 2021 and growing to seven total locations, their model takes pressure off of small- to mid-sized farmers, who do not need to be present at the stands that directly support them. Founding farmers Stephanie Thauer, Stephanie Ciner (40 Under 40 Class of 2024), and Kristen Weeks are some of the passionate people behind the operation but are humble and quick to give credit to the folks who make the stands possible.

The village meeting them with that same spirit includes farmers, volunteers, and partners such as BUILD (under the Hamot Health Foundation) Erie Farm to School program, Erie Downtown Partnership, Erie Food Policy Advisory Council, Master Gardeners, and Groundwork Erie's Green Team of

youth.

"To me, we are creating a space for people to connect or reconnect with fresh, seasonal, local food, and their communities," said Thauer of the Conscious Food Project at Raintree Farms.

"The farm stands are more than a place to get produce. They serve as gathering spaces where people talk about food, how to use and prepare the produce, share stories and recipes, have conversations with other community members, and try different produce. It's a space of learning, sharing, and empowerment. A space of healing and transformation." At a recent stand on 15th and Parade streets, Ciner from Wildfield Urban Farm weighed out some of the bountiful offerings as they made their way into happy hands. Thousands of pounds have circulated in and out, but she shared that same sentiment that it is not just about the produce. She noted they prioritize supporting growers in close proximity (Erie and Crawford Counties) who are intentional about ecological growing practices, and they prioritize supporting areas with the most barriers (transportation and cost).



Local urban farmers have united with nonprofit organization Groundwork Erie to expand the reach and hours of their pay-what-you-can model of farmers markets. Available at one of seven locations throughout Erie county and happening five days a week – affordable, locally-grown produce is more accessible than ever.

What a big beautiful bridge between those who desire fresh, seasonal local foods and those who grow them and what a gift to the community. – Gretchen Gallagher Durney

Running July through October, Mondays through Fridays at various locations and

times // Visit buidlerie.org/hope/pwyc for a full schedule

Groundwork Erie, the Hamot Health Foundation, and the Erie Downtown Partnership are all participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. To donate visit eriegives.org

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EVENTS

Straight up? Nah, We Like Our *Murder on the Rocks*

Prohibition-era murder mystery at speakeasy-themed bar = pretty neat

Beginning Wednesday, Aug. 20

Erie has a long history of serving up murder mystery dinners, from events at the Station Dinner Theatre to productions from In All Seriousness, but perhaps none have been so perfectly staged as *Murder on the Rocks*. And we feel confident saying so because none before have taken place in Downtown Erie’s Room 33, where the main dining area resides behind a hidden door in a bookcase. If that doesn’t scream “murder mystery material,” we don’t know what does.

“This story was 100 percent inspired by the location,” said Adele Crotty, owner and creative director of Penny and Pearl Productions, as well as the show’s writer, director, and producer.

“Room 33 Speakeasy is one of the most interesting, beautiful, and absolutely unique venues in Erie.” The serving of food unfolds as the story

does, with appetizers and a short intro; Act I, followed by dinner; and Act II, followed by dessert and audience guesses as to “whodunnit” (guess correctly and you could win a prize).

She went on to describe how the action takes place in the 1920s and is centered around a handful of fictional employees, played by Katie States,



Local players (from left) Lisa Simonian, Chad Santos, and Tony Lewandowski star in an upcoming whodunit murder mystery dinner at Room 33, a venue that highlights the qualities of the production.

Chad Santos, Lisa Simonian, Tony Lewandowski, and Colleen Munn. “A mysterious crate, a surprise guest from the past, and numbers that just don’t add up, are the main plot points,” Crotty explained.

Ultimately, though, Room 33 is like a sixth character, and while it has no lines, it speaks volumes. According to Crotty, “It helps the audience connect with the characters and the language of the play when they are surrounded by authenticity and ambiance.” The venue even inspired the event poster (designed by Katie Cecchetti). “Having to do zero work setting the ambiance and theme has been a Godsend, truly,” Crotty said. —Cara J. Suppa

Aug. 20, 21, 27, and 28; 6:30 p.m. // Room 33, 1033 State St. // \$65 (includes meal) // For info and tickets visit: tickets.eriereader.com

All Across the Alienation: Green Day’s *American Idiot* at PACA

Modern rock opera captures angst of post-9/11 America

BEGINNING THURSDAY, AUG. 21

When pop-punk trio Green Day came onto the MTV scene back in the late 1990s, they were met with immediate teenage allegiance alongside confounded parents. How can these weirdos with only a few strings on their instruments actually be making music? The answer didn’t matter: their songs were catchy, energetic, and reflected the angst, boredom, and frustration of being young in America. Fast forward a decade or so to 2004 and those three weirdos succeeded in creating a Grammy Award-winning multi-platinum album in *American Idiot* that has since been made into a two-time Tony Award-winning musical that will hit the stage at the Performing Artists Collective Alliance (PACA) this August.

The performance of *American Idiot* contains little to no dialogue, relying on the lyrics from the album to tell the story, which is of three men struggling to find meaning in a post-9/11 America. Johnny (played by Curtis Jones), Tunny (played by Ryan Dawley, 40 Under 40 Class of 2024), and Will (played by James Wallace), leave their sleepy hometowns in an

attempt to find excitement in the big city. Their paths are eventually divided by major life events and the story builds from their life choices. Additionally, the male leads are complemented by their female counterparts: Whatsername (played by Bre Womble), Heather (played by Maeve Kirby, 40 Under 40 Class of 2023), and Extraordinary Girl (played by Rebecca Ropelewski). Director Jordan Wolfe comments on the cast, “The cast is exceptionally strong. We are approaching the show in modern and unique ways and the connections between the castmates and their understanding of the text began on day one. They are full of energy matching the fast-paced nature of Green Day’s music.”

Wolfe comments on the staying power of the album and its continued relevance, “*American Idiot* resonates so strongly today, as it did when it was written, as we watch political factions idolize the violence and separation that divides us as people across several instances.” He continues, “This show encourages uncomfortability, discussions on difficult topics and coping mechanisms, as well as making it inviting to people



Bringing the wildly successful 2004 Green Day album *American Idiot* to life on the PACA stage, a locally star-studded cast led by director Jordan Wolfe prepares to have audiences rocking, rolling, and reflecting on what it means to be an American.

across generational divides due to the popularity of the music. Extremism kills, and if we can highlight it in any way it is our responsibility to do so.” —Erin Phillips

American Idiot (rightly) contains potentially offensive language, sexual themes, and drug use. It’s recommended for an adult audience.

Eight performances through Aug. 31 // 7:30 p.m. (Sunday performances at 2 p.m.) // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$20 // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com

PACA is participating in Erie Gives day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. Donate at eriegives.org

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Tall Ships Erie Returns for 2025

Festival highlights Erie as maritime city

BEGINNING THURSDAY, AUG. 21

Setting sail and returning to the bay-front in August, Tall Ships Erie 2025 gives visitors a unique nautical experience. Featuring historic ships from across the country, the Tall Ships festival has been a central event in Erie for nearly 30 years while serving as the biggest yearly fundraiser for the Flagship Niagara League and the *Lettie G. Howard*. More than just maritime history, it serves as a celebration of the history of Erie and the Great Lakes.

"The tall ships carried commerce and development going into the other ports of the Great Lakes," Rebecca Grimaldi, co-chair and director of development of the Flagship Niagara League said. "Often, Erie thinks of the *Niagara* first, but there's this whole other history of tall ships. [The festival] started this awareness in the Erie community that our maritime history has an[other] excellent chapter."

Fleet Captain William Sabatini, executive director of the Flagship Niagara League, serves as one of the vice chairs of Tall Ships America. "The

Great Lakes have been a big part of [the festival]. Hosting ports across the Great Lakes would coordinate with Tall Ships America for ships to go to certain regions of the country. We wanted to highlight Erie as a maritime city."

The ships featured in this year's festival include Erie's own *Lettie G. Howard*, *Appledoor IV*, *When & If*, *Empire Sandy*, *Pride of Baltimore II*, *Liberty Clipper*, and *Ernestina-Morrissey*.

Hundreds of volunteers assist with the experience, from providing interpretation to helping visitors in line waiting to board the vessels. Ensuring the safety of the event is a priority, with a focus on pedestrian access through collaboration with PennDOT and the City of Erie, and a steady flow of updated information through the Tall Ships website and VisitErie. Shuttles will be running throughout the weekend. In addition to live entertainment and a giant rubber duck, Tall Ships Erie will feature a Kids Zone for families, with multiple activities including lecture series and traditional maritime films in the Bayfront

814 PHOTO BY PATRICK GRAB



Welcoming in the Parade of Sails as the 2025 Tall Ships Festival gets underway, the Flagship Niagara League encourages visitors to explore the historic tall ships at port in Erie for this educational and fun weekend on the water.

Convention Center.

As the festival approaches, Captain Sabatini describes the message this sends to Erie locals and beyond, "Having the tall ships come to your town, it's like rolling the space shuttle right down State Street. The opportunity to see ships like this doesn't happen often. This festival is for you. It means a lot, so we can continue to bring this event back to Erie every three years. The more support we get now, the more we can do in the

future." –Thomas Taylor

Parade of Sails begins Thursday, Aug. 21 at 4 p.m., Festival grounds are open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday through Sunday // Dobbins Landing and Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier // Tickets starting at \$12 // For tickets and info: tallshipserie.org

The Flagship Niagara League is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. To donate visit eriegives.org

Erie Roller Derby Hosts Double Header

Ending the month with a fun-for-all double bout vs. Reading

SATURDAY AUG. 30

Erie Roller Derby will host the second of three home bout events on Saturday, Aug. 30 and this one promises to be *double* the fun. Erie's all-volunteer roller derby team will host back-to-back bouts against Reading Roller Derby's A and B teams at the Bayfront Convention Center at the end of the month.

Both teams are members of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA) with ERD starting in 2010 and Reading beginning shortly after in 2012. Both teams are backed by hometown pride and a sense of community and diversity. For information on rankings, rules, and more visit wft-da.com.

Curious about getting involved in roller derby? ERD will be hosting an open house on Sunday, Aug. 17, from 9 to 10 a.m. at Gem City Skate (3162

West Lake Rd.). You can register at erierollerderby.com. The league coaching team will be on-site and offering the event as a chance to "dip your toe into all things Erie Roller Derby. Check out some gear and get some one-on-one time." The team also has a Skate Camp planned for the fall so those interested can brush up on derby skills. Keep your eyes peeled and on Erie Roller Derby's social media accounts for details. Both skating and non-skating roles are available with derby. The organization states that "no matter what your skill level or experience with roller derby, there's a place for everybody!" – Edwina Capozziello

4:30 to 9:30 p.m. // Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier // General Admission \$10 in advance, \$15 at the door, kids 10 and under are free // For tickets/info: tickets.eriereader.com

ERD



The Erie Roller Derby team is hosting a double-header in August which means a full day of jamming and blocking at the Bayfront Convention Center. Additionally, the derby folks are hosting an open house at Gem City Skate for those curious about joining the team.

EVENTS

Erie Reader Book Club: August 2025

Self Made by A'Leia Bundles

SUNDAY, AUG. 31

The Erie Reader Book Club will be reading and discussing the biography *Self Made: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* by A'Leia Bundles in correspondence with the Erie Gives Erie Reader issue.

In choosing a book for this issue, we turned to the Erie Gives organizers, our friends at the Erie Community Foundation. Thanks to their thoughtful and insightful suggestions, *Self Made* was decided on as this month's choice.

Erie Gives Day is all about supporting local organizations and, at its heart, is a philanthropic venture. Who better than Madam C.J. Walker to represent the spirit of philanthropy in our book club choice – Walker's is a classic 'rags to riches' story, and her dedication to her communities shone through her work.

Born Sarah Breedlove, Madam C.J. Walker was a laundress before founding a line of cosmetics and hair care products for Black women that helped her to become the first Black female self-made millionaire in America. Walker is well-known not only for her wealth, but also her philanthropy and social activism. She made donations to numerous organizations such as the NAACP and was also a patron of the arts.

A'Leia Bundles' connection to the story is a personal one, too: as the great-great-granddaughter of Madam C.J. Walker, she founded the Madam Walker Family Archives and represents the Walker estate for intellectual property and promotional dealings.

The story of Madam C.J. Walker should be an inspiration to us all – someone who made a name for themselves and then used that name to



do as much good as possible in the world. – Ally Kutz

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

Joust in Time: Gem City Renaissance Festival Returns to Frontier Park

One-day fantasy festival, fun for all ages

SUNDAY, AUG. 31

Come one, come all to ye olde Frontier Park for the second annual Gem City Renaissance Festival. This pay-what-you-can historic fantasy festival brings together entertainment, vendors and artisans, food trucks, and

historic demonstrations. Prizes and drawings will include wrapped tankards, royal crownings, and a herald's announcement. Those who preregister for the event will also receive a quest that will lead participants on adventures throughout the park with a special prize for those who complete

their given quests.

"We're gearing up for an even bigger event this year," event organizer Britty Lea (40 Under 40 Class of 2025) shares, as they're expecting to best

Those who preregister for the event will also receive a quest that will lead participants on adventures throughout the park with a special prize for those who complete their given quests.

their numbers from last year, which brought over 250 people, some traveling to Erie for the event from nearby Ohio and Pittsburgh areas. The 2025 Gem City Renaissance Festival is sponsored by Werner Books and Coffee, Radius CoWork, Ember and Forge, Rosco's Vinyl Graphics and Printing Services, Compton's Table, and Peddler's Stoop. – Erin Phillips

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. // Frontier Park, 1501 W. 6th St. // Donations encouraged // For more info or to register visit: gemcityrenaissancefestival.com



Frontier Park goes back in time for the second annual Gem City Renaissance Festival – attendees will get a chance to experience demonstrations, royalty, bard music, and refreshments from times of old when knights were bold.

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Ballad of the Brothers: A Conversation with The Bacon Brothers

MIAC welcomes Michael and Kevin to the Mary D'Angelo stage

By: Ally Kutz

THURSDAY, SEPT. 4

For the better part of the last three decades, The Bacon Brothers have been creating music in a genre all their own. With a unique sound they call Forosoco (folk, rock, soul, country), it is no surprise that they've seen major success and have just released their 12th record, *Ballad Of The Brothers*.

This diverse sound has also taken them around the world, from headlining in Japan to performances at iconic American venues including the Grand Ole Opry and Carnegie Hall. Now, they're bringing that sound to Mercyhurst University's Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center stage, performing songs from their newest album as well as their catalogue.

Ahead of their upcoming performance at Mercyhurst, I was able to correspond with the brothers about their long career as a band, their songwriting process, and what it's like to tour together as brothers.

Ally Kutz (AK): Here in Erie, we have a very eclectic and strong music scene that has really evolved over the years, and I think will be inspired by your musical journey. How do you feel your own sound has evolved over the years, especially from your first album to your latest?

Michael Bacon (MB): Our approach really hasn't changed, but our skill level has improved – the first album (*Forosoco*) was recorded with what would today be considered Stone Age technology, so now we mostly pass the tracks around to our band members. However, on our last album we did four or five tracks with all of us in one room, and actually recorded a track 100 percent live with no clicks, two takes!

Kevin Bacon (KB): A lot of our sound is similar in that we don't have a sound. We basically let the songs dictate what the sound is going to be. Some of our stuff rocks, some of it is softer, more melodic ... we have two songwriters in the band so you're going to have two very different approaches while there are some similarities. I think we're better, that would be my take on the evolution. I think the songs are stronger, we sing better – I definitely play better.

AK: What is the songwriting process like – do you write together or separately? Do you feel more inspired when working together, and that songs come to you more easily that way?

MB: We used to always write together as Kevin needed help with arranging and recording his songs. Later, we wrote "Tin Pan Alley" style, songs written for others to sing or songs for Kevin's movies. When we started the band, we stuck with more personal, confessional writing because that's what we do best.

KB: We generally write separately. We both come up with an idea and then will demo it and bounce it off each other for input before eventually bringing it into the band to see how to make it a reality. Sometimes the reality of the way things are recorded is very close to our original ideas, and sometimes it's very different – sometimes Michael or I will have some really interesting production or song structure ideas that we'll use.

AK: I know you have a large catalogue of songs from over the years, but is there one that means the most to each of you personally? If so, which song and for what reason(s)?

MB: For me, it's "The Way We Love" – it summarizes my 50+ years of marriage.

KB: I think the songs that I'm really connected to are the ones that are connected to family – my wife or kids, but there are a lot of those. As I tell my wife, every song is about her.

AK: Is there a process you follow to decide who sings lead vocals on a track, or does it come more from a "feeling" that one would be better than the other for the song?

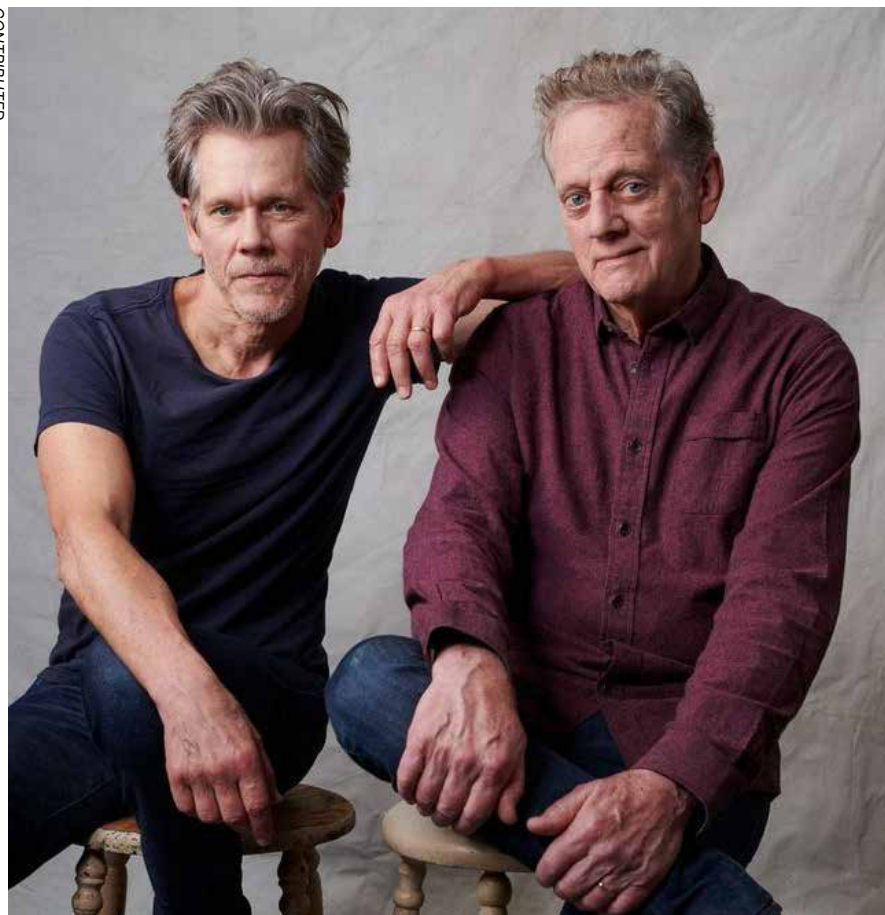
MB: Whoever owns it intones it (sorry). When we write with other people, the songs turn out better suited to my brother.

KB: I've written a couple of songs for Michael to sing, but usually whoever wrote the song does the lead vocal.

AK: Do you feel that, being brothers, it gets difficult to separate "family" time from "band" time? Or does your bond as siblings make these times easier to differentiate (or even make them one in the same)?

MB: Families with busy siblings have

CONTRIBUTED



Before the Bacon Brothers take the MIAC stage at the Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, they were able to correspond with Ally Kutz to chat about their music, their inspiration, and their experiences on the road.

to actively make time to spend together, so when we're on a tour bus we're stuck with each other, which is a bonus.

KB: I think finding time for the band is always difficult, there's so much else going on, including family. I think, in general being a person that works, and works hard, finding time for family stays incredibly important.

AK: Who would you say is the more laid-back Bacon brother on tour?

KB: I'd say Michael – he's very happy to have people tell him what to do, and I'm much more controlling. I need to know everything that is happening, all of the details.

AK: Have you had any strange or unexpected interactions over the years?

MB: We once had someone ask us to sign an artificial leg for them!

AK: What music do you listen to when not creating music of your own? Any favorite bands/artists you think people should check out?

KB: Recently, my favorite playlist is Black Puma's radio – I like neo-soul, and there's a lot of great neo-soul

happening right now that I really love. I really like *Cowboy Carter*, that's my definition of FOROSOCO (folk, rock, soul, country). I know Michael and I are both big fans of Chappell Roan.

AK: What drives you to keep creating music after all these albums and years?

MB: I don't know how to do anything else!

KB: The thing that keeps us going is always the songs – if you write a song, you want to record it and share it with everyone.

7:30 p.m. // Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. // \$25-\$50 // For tickets and info: call the box office at (814) 824-3000 or visit miac.mercyhurst.edu

MIAC is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. To donate visit eriegives.org

Ally Kutz is a freelance writer and avid book reader who helps organize the Erie Reader Book Club. She can be reached at ally.kutz1@gmail.com.



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Gem City Style: Brandon Wiley of OpenedEyes

From a sixth-grade question to a global vision

By: Jessica Hunter

We met at a local coffee shop where Brandon Wiley balanced more than just conversation. With his 11-month-old baby girl in his arms and his elementary school-aged son seated beside him, he somehow managed to speak with clarity, patience, and purpose – never missing a beat. It was a fitting introduction to the founder of OpenedEyes, a nonprofit rooted in identity, empathy, and resilience. Watching him navigate fatherhood while reflecting on his organization’s impact was a living example of the very values he teaches: presence, vulnerability, and connection. And while OpenedEyes may now be reaching communities across the country and beyond, it all began with a single, jarring question posed to Wiley in a sixth-grade classroom: “What are you?”

Brandon Wiley’s entire professional and personal journey, he explains, has been centered on identity. The idea to write a book, a direct response to that childhood question, presented a unique opportunity to reclaim the narrative, transforming an unflattering memory into a productive and reflective pursuit. This pivotal decision, Wiley noted, “paved the way for what I’m doing now with the organization and trying to encourage other people to find their identities.”

Wiley’s background as a licensed mental health therapist has profoundly shaped OpenedEyes’ programs. Starting in childhood and adolescent therapy, the founder quickly realized the potential of integrating counseling principles into a broader scope, impacting adults as well as youths. “Everybody goes through changes or an identity crisis at some point,” he emphasizes, highlighting the universal need for self-understanding. This holistic approach was evident in a recent workshop on the stigma of mental health among adult men, a topic the founder felt deeply thankful to address. He explained that men often struggle to express emotions for fear of ostracization or emasculation. OpenedEyes, therefore, aims to reframe this narrative, demonstrating that “men can talk about their feelings too, and it’s actually powerful.”

Since its launch in 2014, OpenedEyes has undergone a significant evolution. Initially focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), the organization has refined its approach. While Wiley believes DEI is far from “going ghost,” he recognizes the misconceptions surrounding it, particularly on a political level. OpenedEyes has strategically positioned DEI as a “subset” of overall wellness. Now, he explains, “we’re going into businesses and organizations, school districts, and we’re talking about how to be personally and professionally well, and within that conversation, we tie in inclusive principles.” This broader scope, emphasizing mental health and wellness with inclusion as a core component, has allowed OpenedEyes to significantly expand their services.

The organization’s distinctive “mindfulness-based

JESSICA HUNTER



This month, Jessica Hunter met up with Brandon Wiley, founder of the local nonprofit organization Opened Eyes, which is a therapy-based program designed originally to help struggling youth but has recently expanded to include counseling principles for adults, as well.

lens on diversity” in workshops and training centers on creating a space where vulnerability is embraced. The founder, drawing on his therapeutic expertise, understands the challenge of connecting deeply with an audience in a limited timeframe. The solution: “It’s about self-disclosure. It’s about vulnerability. It’s about being open to their story too,” he explains. When the team shares real experiences, it empowers attendees, who often exclaim, “Oh, he just said that! I’ve even been experiencing that!” This authenticity fosters a sense of comfort that allows others to open up. The founder encapsulates this philosophy with a compelling phrase: “It’s providing comfortability in uncomfortability.” These conversations, Wiley acknowledges, are inherently tough, but “if we can provide some level of comfortability in that uncomfortable feeling, we’re winning.”

OpenedEyes’ journey has been one of remarkable growth, expanding from its Erie roots partnering with diverse entities from insurance firms to school counselors. For the founder, the most standout moments are often simple yet profound: the realization that people in different parts of the country genuinely want to hear what he has to say.

One of OpenedEyes’ most impactful initiatives is its youth-focused LENS program, which explores perception, prejudice, and resilience. Through assembly-style conversations, Wiley has witnessed students opening up about deeply personal and often heavy topics, including mental health issues, depression, and suicidality. Sharing his own battles with mental health often inspires kids to do the same. “We’ve had kids come up and say, ‘I’ve dealt with some suicidal thoughts,’” the founder reveals, highlighting the power of breaking the stigma.

Local recognition has also played a role. Winning the 2023 Spirit of Erie Award through the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership was not about accolades for the founder, but a validation that “the work that we’re doing actually matters.” He quickly shares any recognition with his team, understanding that “I wouldn’t be where I’m at without them.” This shared success reinforces that their message is “resonating with the people of the community” and making a tangible difference.

Looking ahead, OpenedEyes has ambitious goals. Wiley envisions expanding their services and licensing their programs. A new initiative is partic-

ularly exciting: a Mental Health First Aid program designed to teach individuals how to recognize their own mental health issues, support others, and identify signs of suicidality. His ultimate vision for OpenedEyes is to take “not just a national but a global form and expand our service into all parts of the country and all parts of the world... to create environments of wellness overall.”

On a personal level, OpenedEyes has been transformative for its founder. “I realized that growing up, I was always very afraid to speak out in front of people, and very insecure... I hated public speaking,” he confessed, a stark contrast to his current role delivering keynote presentations across the country. “OpenedEyes has allowed me to be free and to really come into my own person.” The organization, he asserts, is “in my heart forever,” with the ultimate goal being its longevity beyond his leadership – a legacy that continues to impact lives. When asked about simple daily habits for mindfulness, the answer is immediate: “The gym, the gym, the gym.” Wiley’s 5:45 a.m. routine, involving reflection and music on the way to the gym, is “my

[OpenedEyes] distinctive “mindfulness-based lens on diversity” in workshops and training centers on creating a space where vulnerability is embraced .. [A]uthenticity [in the form of self-disclosure] fosters a sense of comfort that allows others to open up. Says founder Brandon Wiley: “It’s providing comfortability in uncomfortability.”

personal time.” Writing, particularly poetry, is another cherished mindfulness practice. Reflecting on that sixth-grade question, “What are you?,” the founder offers profound advice to his younger self: “Buckle up for a hell of a ride, because this question may seem devastating now, but it’s going to be a pathway to freedom.” Wiley explains that he once viewed the question as imprisonment, but it ultimately became the catalyst for liberation.

OpenedEyes is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 12. Consider donating at eriegives.org to help support their mission of fostering self-discovery, mental wellness, and inclusive dialogue in our community and beyond. For more info about OpenedEyes visit openedeyes.org

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

The Shrouds is Too Clinical for Its Own Good

Till death do us part



The ubiquity of social media and the constant presence of recording technology have been rich subjects for science fiction lately. How does perpetually being on camera affect a person’s life? But not many of them have asked how this technology affects a person’s death. Naturally, David Cronenberg asks this engaging question with his new film *The Shrouds*, which takes a truly fascinating idea and, sadly, buries it in a conspiracy subplot that is far less interesting.

The film follows GraveTech CEO Karsh (Vincent Cassel) who, after losing his wife Becca (Diane Kruger) to cancer, invents a controversial new technology called “The Shrouds,” a sort of full-body camera that can be wrapped around a dead body so loved ones can look into the grave and watch it decompose. However, after protestors destroy multiple graves including his wife’s, Karsh sets out to find the perpetrators while also thinking back to his final days with Becca.

The scenes between Karsh and his wife are heartbreaking. Watching a loved one slowly become less and less of themselves makes for harrowing viewing (Cronenberg came up with the premise after his own wife’s death), but these scenes are too few and far between. Instead we get an uninteresting who-



dunnit that never really takes off. The initial idea of cameras following one even after death and how media leaves “ghosts” of people behind is peak Cronenberg, but his style is too cold and clinical to really delve into that concept. I understand that he is saying how death leaves no real answers or explanations, but as a narrative, it is frustratingly obtuse. – Forest Taylor

The Shrouds is currently playing in select theaters and is also available on the Criterion Channel and to rent on Amazon Prime and Apple TV+.

Written and directed by David Cronenberg // Starring Vincent Cassel, Diane Kruger, Guy Pearce, Sandrine Holt, Elizabeth Saunders, Jennifer Dale, Eric Weinthal, Jeff Yung, Ingvar E. Sigurdsson, Vieslav Krystyan, and Matt Willis // Sideshow and Janus Films // 120 minutes // Rated R

Mass Hysteria: Eddington is a Brilliant Snapshot of a Confusing Time

Director Ari Aster shines floodlight on pandemic-era antagonism



The COVID-19 pandemic didn’t so much trigger societal tensions between neighbors as it revealed the long-gestating hostility that had been brewing in society. It unmasked some ugly truths about the antisocial behaviors of the modern world and how technology was creating social isolation and political resentment among people. Naturally, Ari Aster shines a floodlight at these ugly truths with his new film *Eddington*, the first American film to really discuss how the pandemic impacted the world (I say American because it doesn’t include Radu Jude’s brilliant satire *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*) and even though some parts of the second half go a bit too far into the ridiculous, it’s a disturbing picture of a very disturbing time.

In the small town of Eddington, New Mexico in May of 2020, Sheriff Joe Cross (Joaquin Phoenix) makes an impulsive decision to run for mayor after heated disagreements with the town’s COVID restrictions. This puts him at odds with the town’s current mayor (Pedro Pascal) and uncovers a long-festering animosity between them centered around Cross’ emotionally traumatized wife (Emma Stone). As tensions rise and accusations are made, *Eddington* becomes a hotbed of socio-political agitation, and it’s only a matter of time before blood is spilled.



Using a small American town as a microcosm of the country during a tumultuous time is a brilliant choice, and Aster has some sadistic fun showing how a simple argument over mask mandates can lead to the destruction of an entire community. He argues that COVID didn’t create this antagonism, it was merely the spark to a long-dormant powder keg just waiting to go off. Gathering limitations and social distancing revealed just how truly isolated we all really were. – Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Ari Aster // Starring Joaquin Phoenix, Pedro Pascal, Luke Grimes, Deidre O’Connell, Michael Ward, Matt Gomez Hidaka, William Belleau, Clifton Collins Jr., Cameron Mann, Amelie Hoeferle, Landall Goolsby, Elise Falanga, King Orba, Rachel de la Torre, Austin Butler, and Emma Stone // A24 // 149 minutes // Rated R

Community is a Character

An interview with *Pauline from 2 to 3* director Richard Rutkowski

By: Forest Taylor

I had the honor of seeing the documentary *Pauline from 2 to 3* on June 21 and before the show, I sat down with director Richard Rutkowski to talk about his inspirations and goals for the film in anticipation for a private screening at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center's Big Green Screen on Aug. 21.

The documentary, which chronicles one year in the life of Rutkowski's grandmother Pauline between her 102nd and 103rd birthdays (Pauline is now 104) is what he describes as "a woman's story and a picture of Erie," juxtaposing her life and the lives of the numerous family members she has affected throughout that life with the ups and downs of her community and the city in which she has lived.

On his intentions for what he hopes to achieve with the film, Rutkowski says: "I want to tell the unexamined stories of the Greatest Generation. By which I mean women's stories," adding, "So many of the stories about the Greatest Generation are seen through the eyes of the men who went overseas to fight in the war. This is the story of one woman among the many who were taking care of the home-front during the country's most difficult times."

Filmed in a Cinema Verite, fly-on-the-wall style, Rutkowski was inspired by the films of Albert Mayles (*Grey Gardens*), Ross McElwee (*Sherman's March*) and Errol Morris (*Gates of Heaven*). "Those filmmakers are my teachers", he says.



The locally produced film *Pauline from 2 to 3* tells the story of Pauline, the 103-year-old grandmother of the film's creator Richard Rutkowski. Forest Taylor sat down with Rutkowski to learn more about the film prior to its screening at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center later this month.

He hopes that the film will emphasize the interconnectivity that individual people have with their community and their city, especially in smaller cities like Erie. "Showing one woman's life in a random neighborhood in a fairly unknown city could work to connect the various people in that community," he says. "Every house is full of people, each with their own unique lives, both interior and exterior, and those lives come together to create

a community. Film allows you to be your own mirror. It can present a person's exterior and interior lives simultaneously. Pauline's life has affected the lives of so many people around her and those lives affect others and it keeps spreading out from there. Life is cyclical."

Rutkowski hopes that his film shows the deep connectivity that people have with each other and how those connections create a community,

saying, "Community is a character."

Pauline from 2 to 3 will have a private screening at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center on Thursday, Aug. 21. To connect to the screening, visit paulinefrom2to3.com

Film *Erie* and the Tom Ridge Environmental Center are both participating in *Erie Gives Day* on Tuesday, Aug. 12. To donate, visit eriegives.org





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Alexa Gurley
ROOTS
Self-released

★★★★★

Edinboro-based artist Alexa Gurley introduces herself with *ROOTS*, a debut album that’s grounded and emotionally rich. With influences of indie folk and acoustic Americana, the singer-songwriter delivers a deeply personal album, each track shaped by stories close to home and with instrumentals she performed herself. Gurley’s deep connection to music began at a young age, and she has since showcased her talents at both local and international music festivals. Driven by textured instrumentals and soft vocals, *ROOTS* carries an intimate, lived-in feel that invites listeners into Gurley’s world. The album features a blend of slow, mellow tunes with artsy, upbeat tracks. The second track, “Back To My Roots,” delivers a heartfelt ode to Gurley’s personal journey of rediscovery. Gurley leans into a rustic sound throughout *ROOTS*, letting each note breathe with quiet intention. The album closes with “Said,” a song featuring strong vocals and an upbeat melody paired with humble lyrics reflecting the influence of Gurley’s mother and grandmother. Themes of healing and confrontation weave through *ROOTS’* seven songs, where Gurley embraces raw, soothing acoustic melodies and emotionally stripped-down songwriting. With streams in more than 16 countries, *ROOTS* signals the arrival of a promising voice from northwestern Pennsylvania. – Julia Carden



Frame and Mantle
Well of Light
Self-Released

★★★★★

Who needs subgenres, anyways? On their second full-length album *Well of Light*, Frame and Mantle shed any typical post-rock or emo template they may have been following in favor of something bigger, darker, and largely new for the quartet. Take, for instance, the album’s opening title track, where vocalist Connor Freer sounds more in control than ever. Harmonizing with their own screams, Freer is backed by Brian Thompson’s soft and sinister guitar work. It’s not your typical opening track, but it’s a risk that pays off and sets the tone for what’s to come. Single “Down a Thousand” recalls the heyday of melodic hardcore legends Title Fight, offering larger-than-life chugging and gnashing vocals that border on spoken word by the song’s second verse. But as its title suggests, *Well of Light* often hides a glimmer of brightness in its angst-driven songs, such as the horns that open the melancholy but jangly “Failsafe.” Most impressively, Frame and Mantle weaves all of these sounds together into something substantial and cohesive – a surefire sign that the band is continuing to mature with time. – Aaron Mook



Saturn To Brazil
Cosmic Tumblers
Self-released

★★★★★

Erie’s own jazz jam combo Saturn To Brazil released their debut album *Cosmic Tumblers* both online and in physical form on transparent blue vinyl. The core members are City Gallery co-owner Stephen Trohoske on bass, Mike Russo on guitar, Ken “Stix” Thompson on drums, Dave Tamulonis on violin, and Joel Hunt on saxophone. The group combines elements of jazz, psych, jam, and rock, creating a journey that seems at once constructed and spontaneous. They recruited pianist Frank Singer to join the voyage on the first three tracks, including the hard-grooving opener “Swords,” the distortion heavy “Garbageland,” and the chill “Upside Down Tango,” which shifts gears into more mellow territory. Preach Freedom provides percussion for “Paw Prints In The Snow,” carried by a funky hook that becomes trance-like (Including a smooth saxophone solo by Roby Edwards), and “Swiper No Swiping,” delivered in a future jazz style that is reminiscent of some of Herbie Hancock’s work. The album continues its intergalactic tones with “Spears,” a jam that slows down and dips its toes in the krautrock genre, leading into “Trouble In The Gulf,” the only song with vocals (provided by Niecey Nicole, whose poetic style demands attention). Saturn To Brazil ends their trek with “It’s So Easy To Die,” a live track recorded by the band at PACA, proving that they sound just as tight live as they do in the studio. *Cosmic Tumblers* is a musical trip that will take you out of this world. – Larry Wheaton



Tyler Childers
Snipe Hunter
RCA

★★★★★

Tyler Childers has never made the same album twice (unless you count *Can I Take My Hounds to Heaven*, where he made the same record three times). On *Snipe Hunter*, he’s leaned into that restlessness, blending his patented idiosyncratic storytelling with a more rock-forward approach from start to finish. This might come as little surprise due to the fact that with this record, he’s teamed up with legendary producer Rick Rubin. The results are equally ambitious and off-putting, like EDM pulsating through the oft-mentioned holler, or hearing a Hare Krishna chant at a dive bar. The tracks are mostly upbeat in superficial tone, filled with blaring, lush instrumentation. One perplexing outlier is the inclusion of a studio version of “Nose to the Grindstone” (and to a lesser extent “Oneida”). The fan favorite has been available for years in live recordings, but finally gets an honest release here, albeit in the middle of the album. The new material sounds and feels great. It’s high-energy, genre-bending alt-country which by all accounts should be a winner. It just seems to lack that all-too-special spark that “Grindstone” had in spades. That urgency, the bare naturalism, the passion and regret just feel like an echo of the past. *Snipe Hunter* is certainly more memorable than 2023’s *Rustin In the Rain* (aside from “In Your Love” obviously), but it’s no *Purgatory* or *Country Squire*. Perhaps it’s no coincidence that the album’s title references a person searching for something that never existed in the first place. – Nick Warren



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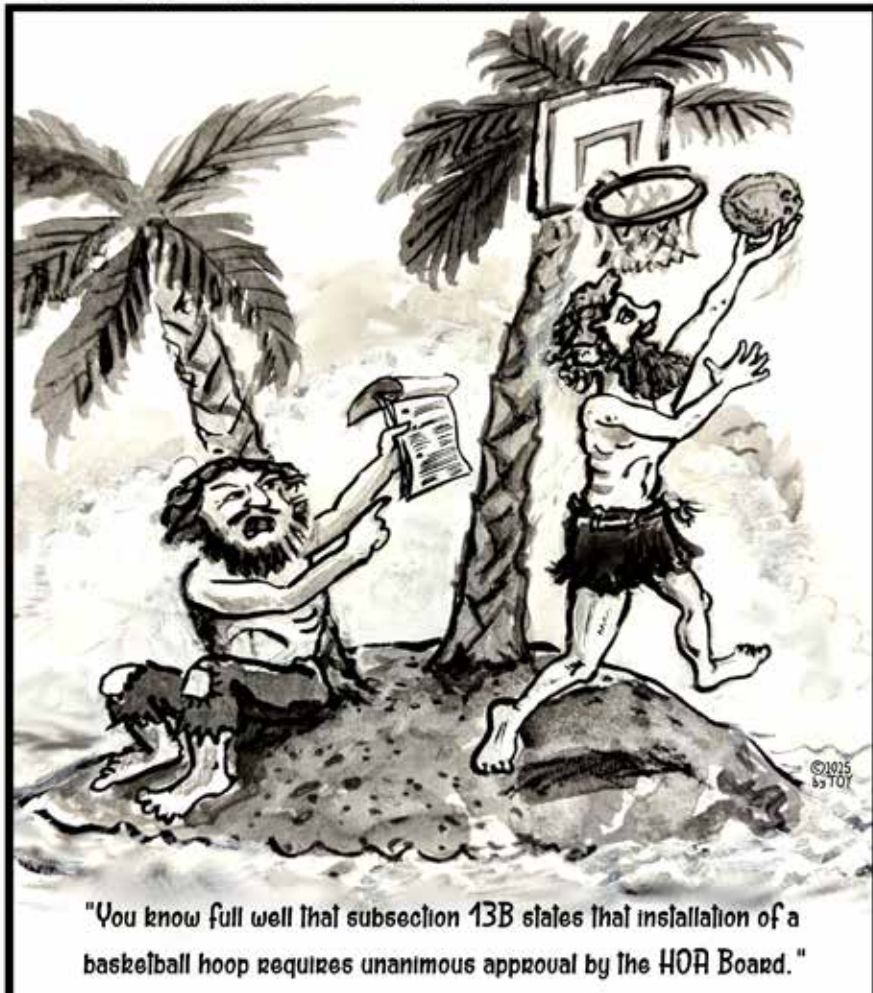
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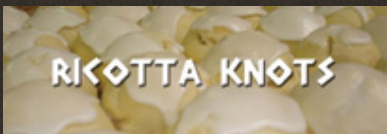
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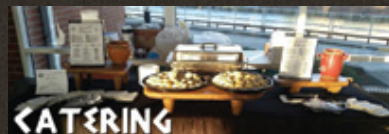
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RICOTTA KNOTS

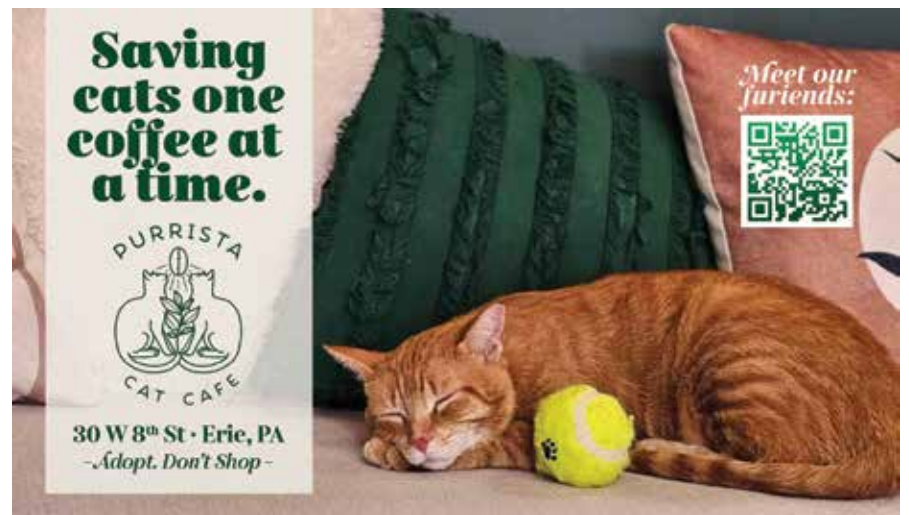


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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	13	14
15									16					
17									18					
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60							61							

Across

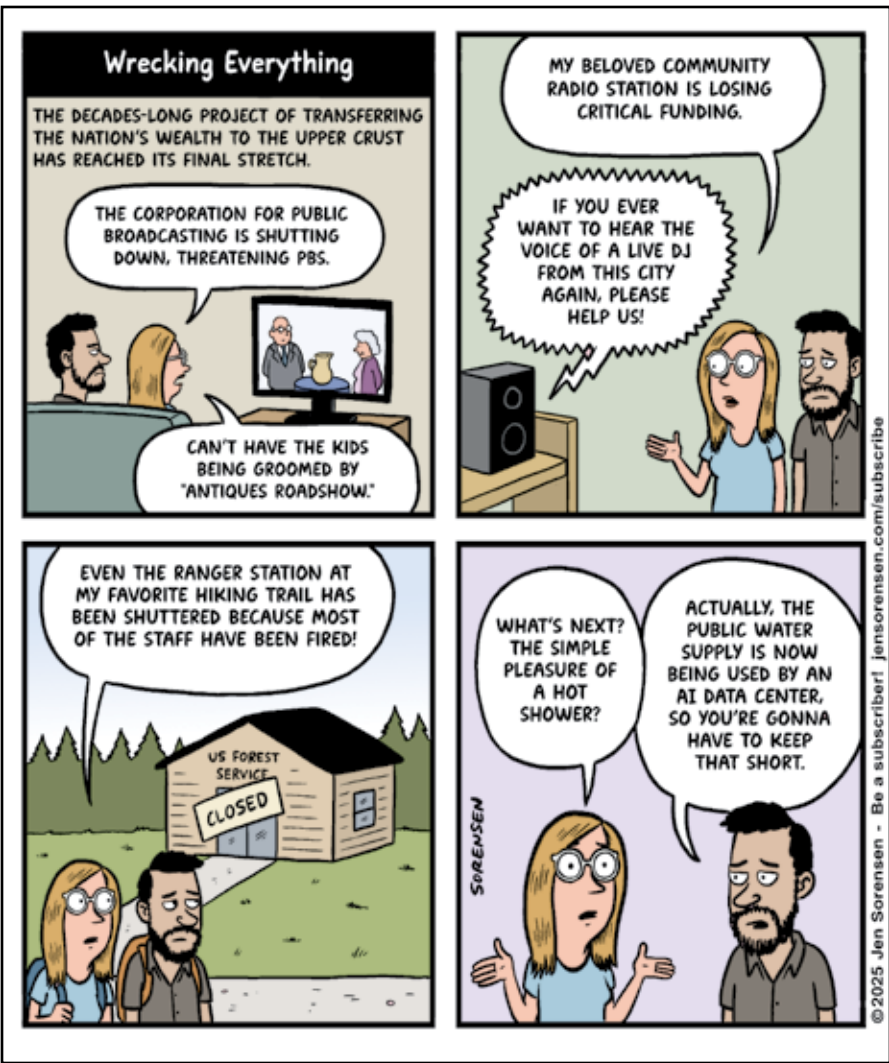
1. Nickelodeon character with a heartbreaking viral video in which he finds out his show has been canceled
9. Side, back, cottage, and jowl, e.g.
15. Match
16. Music genre that fits in with Hot Topic
17. Slowpokes
18. Cold sore treatment brand
19. "The Westing Game" author Raskin
20. Tucked in before bed?
22. Battle of Hastings region
24. Brown, e.g.
25. Pit
26. Ltd., across the Chunnel
27. Order
29. Guinea pig lookalikes
30. ___ Octavius ("Spider-Man" villain)
32. Navel scraping?
34. Bridge component
36. Title seventeen-year-old on Broadway
39. Low-quality images?
43. Tricked
44. Macron's head
45. Night sch. course, maybe

46. It comes before a fall
47. Prefix meaning 10 to the 18th power
48. Match single socks again
51. Singer-songwriter, e.g.
54. Aleppo's country
55. Invader of the Roman Empire
56. Abstainer's mantra
58. Group of infected computers
59. Like many half-courses
60. Most distant point
61. Like some livestock

Down

1. "Wrecking Crew" guitarist Tommy (whose surname means "German" in Italian)
2. Capital of the territory featured in Netflix's "North of North" (2025)
3. {}, mathematically
4. Certain locks
5. "So Wrong" singer Patsy
6. Rush, quaintly
7. Caldecott Medal winner ___ Jack Keats
8. First-come, first-served arrangement, maybe
9. Like suspicious eyes
10. Prefix with valent

11. Diversion where the walls may have ears?
12. Easy area to pass to, in hockey
13. Devotional periods
14. Lean to the extreme
21. 50-50 shot
23. Nelson Mandela's native tongue
28. 1990s tennis star ___ S-nchez Vicario
29. Montblanc product
31. "Lecture ___" (John Cage text first delivered in 1950)
33. Irretrievable item
35. Actor Philip of "Kung Fu"
36. "Wicked: For Good" character
37. Elite
38. Get comfortable with
40. Discover
41. Small opening where spores are released
42. Like some skirts or slacks
47. On the maternal side
49. Twisty curves
50. They're hard to believe
52. Former Ozzy Osbourne guitarist Jake ___
53. Bahrain ruler
57. "De ___ Vez" (Selena Gomez single)



Answers to last puzzle

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

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