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THE AUDACITY OF HOPE THEN, AND NOW

BARACK OBAMA COMES TO
ERIE FOR A CONVERSATION

JUSTICE FOR CHELLO
COALITION SEEKS
ANSWERS, DEMANDS
TRANSPARENCY

HORNBY SCHOOLHOUSE
RINGS IN 150 YEARS

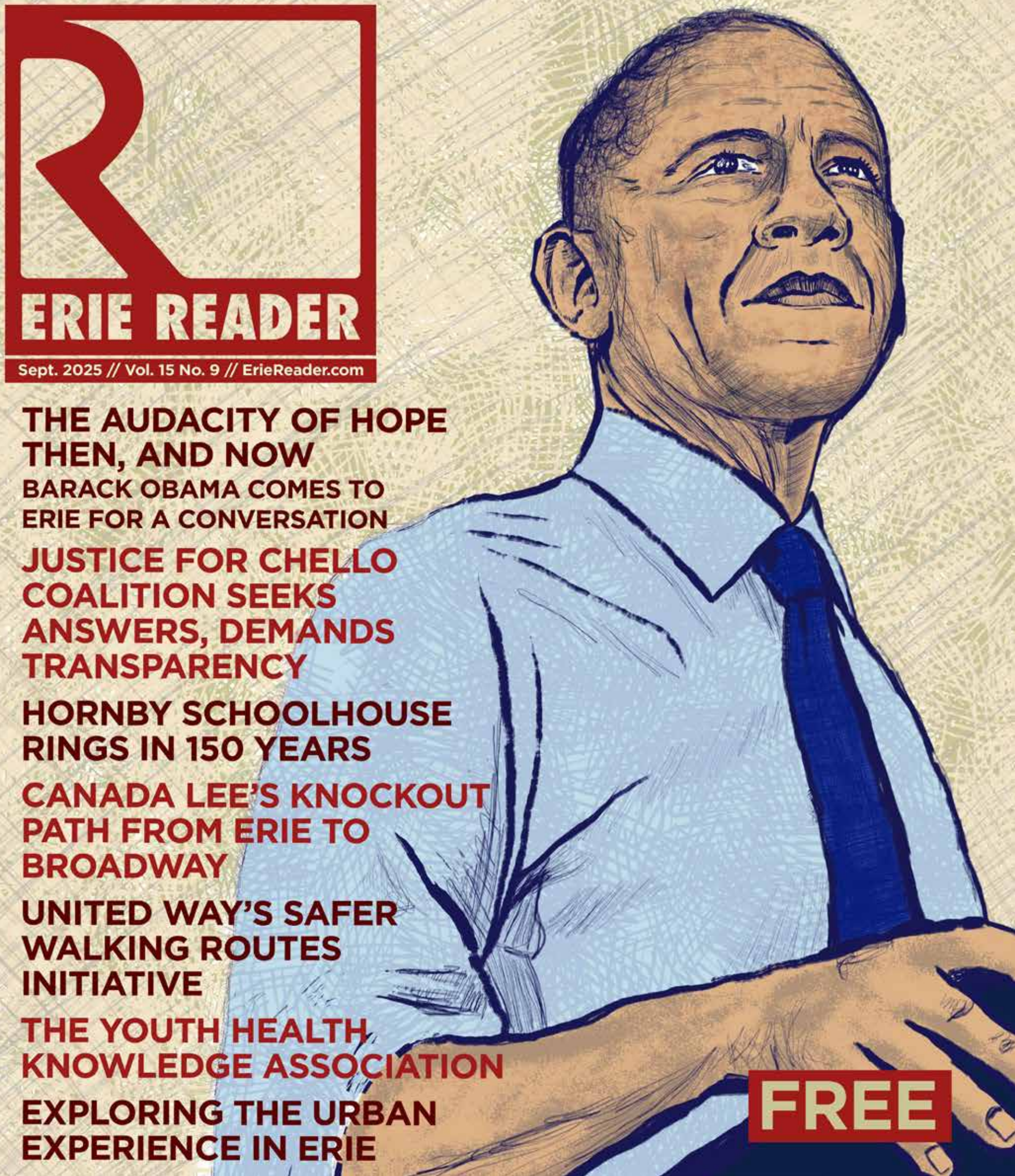
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From the Editors: September 2025

Listening ears

Summer is ending – can you feel it? The cicadas are humming, the migratory birds start their remarkable treks south, greens turn to golds, asters and phlox come into bloom, and America’s children inevitably return to school.

From the way our elected leaders speak, one would think that children are our greatest priority here in America. Republicans want more babies and they are seemingly trying to increase the birth rate: enacting abortion bans and limiting access to birth control. But what will happen to these children once they’re born? Those in power may *speak* about their love of children, but do they show it through their actions?

Not even a day into the new school year, and we’re already reckoning with a deadly school shooting, stealing the lives of children as they were praying in their church. And in its wake, our leaders show us that they continue to value guns more than children with their inaction, their continued scapegoating of mental illness, and their ignorance of the root of the issue – guns, in fact, kill people. Guns, in this case and in so many others, kill children.

Leaders continue to discount and disbelieve the words of women who were abused as children speaking out on their experiences and calling for justice and change. We continue to protect the politically powerful at the expense of the mental and

physical safety of teenage girls.

Lawmakers celebrate the slashing of SNAP benefits, cuts to Medicaid and CHIP programs, eliminating free school meals and community-based health care initiatives.

Our leaders have effectively shut down the Department of Education, which had, up until now, worked towards ensuring that all kids have fair and equal access to a quality public education. The dramatic rise in school-mandated book bans mean our school children will inevitably have a smaller worldview and fewer critical thinking skills.

Vaccine access for children to avoid the flu and COVID this season is a challenge – meaning more mid-year sicknesses, forcing parents to max out excused absences and children missing more classroom days. Not to mention the potential resurgence of previously eradicated childhood diseases like polio and measles in Florida (and beyond).

It seems like we actually don’t *really* care about children at all.

If we actually cared about children, we would listen to them, believe them, and work as hard as we possibly can to keep them safe, healthy, fed, and educated. As it stands, many folks in Erie are taking these matters into their own hands.

The Erie School District, helmed by new superintendent Dr. Natalyn Gibbs and School Board President

Jay Breneman, are actively listening to students and parents, and then holding school leadership and governance accountable for outcomes. Read more about their approach in their jointly written op-ed within.

Children themselves are taking responsibility for filling in the gaps in educational leadership as well as public health. Read more about the budding (and award-winning) Erie School District Student Leadership Program, as well as a Fairview student group’s Youth Health Knowledge Association, helping to make healthcare education more accessible in the local community.

The Lake Erie Lit Fest is taking on the book-banning trend by hosting their first ever Banned Book giveaway during their annual event at Frontier Park. Anyone attending is welcome to take a banned book from their selection and get those critical thinking muscles working.

The United Way, always at the helm of student support, are doubling down their efforts at keeping children safe as they expand their Safe Walking Routes initiative’s reach.

Read about all of these stories and more, within. Do we have our listening ears on? Our children do. They are listening and learning from the choices that adults make every single day and they will be living the consequences of those choices long after those who made them are gone.

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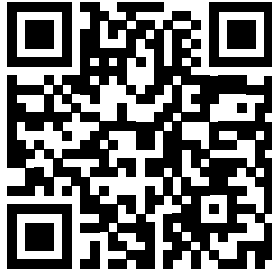
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Signs of Our Times

How to defend and demand democracy

By: Liz Allen

As co-founder and chair of Fair Districts PA, Carol Kuniholm, Ph.D. travels across Pennsylvania to explain in no-nonsense terms that gerrymandering shuts out citizen voices, causes gridlock in the state House and Senate, and erodes democracy.

Her Aug. 25 talk at the Jefferson Educational Society drew a large crowd, including Paulette Hessinger, organizer for Erie Indivisible, and Lori Morse-Dolan, who has been active in Fair Districts in Erie, in the grassroots group Keep Our Library Public, and in efforts to preserve the history of women's suffrage.

A week after hearing Kuniholm's presentation about the urgent need for more Americans to become "ambassadors for democracy," Hessinger warmly welcomed people as they walked into a meet-up organized by Erie Indivisible to make "pro-democracy and pro-voting" yard signs.

This wasn't an anti-Trump protest. Rather, at the "Arts and Crafts Against Fascism" gathering, in a space offered by Grounded Printshop, 1902 Cherry St., Hessinger encouraged participants to embrace a spirit of "cooperation and collaboration." Preserving democracy should be a non-partisan cause, and outreach efforts, including yard signs, must focus on making people "eager to vote," she said.

At the urging of her daughter in California, Hessinger had researched the national group Indivisible, which advocates for "a real democracy – of, by, and for the people," according to indivisible.org. When she discovered the work of French Creek Indivisible in Edinboro, "I felt like I got a hug. There are other people like me. I'm not weird," she said. In February, she launched an Erie Indivisible group.

Creativity and camaraderie abounded as people used pencils, stencils, paints, and markers to make signs. Vanessa Mazza, Rose Graham, and other volunteers provided materials and a list of suggested slogans, including "Vote Or Be Silenced."

Anna McCartney and other members of Keep Our Library Public (KOLP) know all too well what happens when public voices are silenced.

Since 2023, KOLP has been fighting the decision by Erie County Executive Brenton Davis and Erie County Council to lease part of Blasco Library to Gannon University for its Center for Lake Erie Education and Research (CLEER), Phase 3 of its six-phase Project NePTWNE. KOLP's lawsuit against Davis and Gannon is expected to go to trial in December, even as Gannon has already renovated its space in the library for an anticipated opening in October.

Now, the *Save Blasco!* documentary by Cayce Mell and 2nd State Productions chronicles KOLP's two-year fight against attempts by public- and private-sector leaders to silence them for opposing Gannon's library lease.

McCartney met Mell a year ago, when they became neighbors in North East after Mell moved there from Pittsburgh. Mell said a fluke encounter with a library book inspired her to research, write, and produce her first film, *Tracing Outlines*. The name comes from the avant-garde art gallery her late grandmother owned and operated in Pittsburgh for five years, starting in 1941.

At an antique sale in 2009, Mell had helped to collect some yellowed papers that flew out of a library book. She was astounded to see her grandmother's name, Elizabeth Rockwell, listed on a typed sheet along with famed modern artists such as Pablo Picasso and Paul Klee. Mell spent six years researching her grandmother's story before her film premiered in 2015.

As a young woman, her grandmother faced long odds in running a gallery featuring modern art. But Elizabeth Rockwell carried on. That's also what members of KOLP do in their advocacy, by celebrating the connections between public libraries and democracy, by attending Erie County Council meetings, by organizing protests, and by posting on social media.

"This is the way change happens," Morse-Dolan explains in the Mell film, when a TV reporter interviews her outside the Erie County Courthouse before a county council meeting. "This is the way that mistakes are correct-



Vanessa Mazza, left, and Nicole Pyle show the signs they made at the "Arts & Crafts Against Fascism" meet-up at Grounded Print Shop in Erie.

ed, (with) people standing up and using their voices."

In addition to her local activism, Morse-Dolan is a member of the National Collaborative for Women's History Sites and an advisory board member for the Justice Bell Foundation. She knows that the battle for democracy has a long, fraught history in our country.

"The movement for women's suffrage was a decades-long struggle in the United States and was a turning point in our country's history. The 19th Amendment franchised 26 million women, although not equally. At the same time, actions were taken to exclude men and women due to widespread racism and other factors," she said in an interview.

"The 19th Amendment was a crucial step for democracy, but [only] a single step in the citizen pursuit of a more representative, just democracy. The quest continues and calls upon every American to be politically engaged, educated on issues, and to vote in each and every election," she said. The *Save Blasco!* documentary is a reminder that speaking out takes courage. For example, it's still stunning to watch Erie County Sheriff's

deputies escort members of the public out of a special county council meeting on Dec. 18, 2023, on the order of then-chairman Brian Shank.

Shank had ordered that people at the meeting could pick only a single person to speak about library issues. Those who defied his ruling were made to leave. (Shank had already lost his bid for re-election to represent the fifth district to Chris Drexel in the Nov. 7, 2023 election).

Save Blasco! received an honorable mention award in the recent Defense of Democracy Film Festival and has also been selected for screening at the Lake Effect Film Festival Sept. 11-12. Most films will be shown at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center but *Save Blasco!* can be seen on Saturday, Sept. 13, at 11 a.m. at Five Iron Golf, 1000 State St. For more information and for tickets, visit rhoxonproductions.com/lakeeffectfilmfestival

The decision to defend democracy and reform government can be sparked in different ways, but library-book issues might be a common factor.

For Carol Kuniholm, her research into how gerrymandering hurts the common good began when she worked



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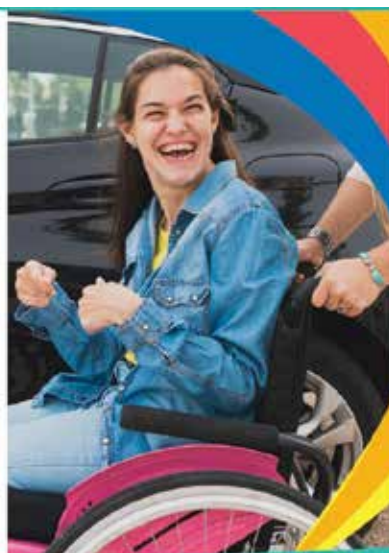
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as a youth pastor in Paoli, outside Philadelphia. Her church wanted to donate books to public school libraries in Philadelphia, only to learn that most of those schools couldn't even afford school libraries.

That led her to question inequities in funding for public education in Pennsylvania and, ultimately, to hone in on the need to end gerrymandering because, as Pennsylvania politics currently work, "Our legislators don't listen to us at all," she said.

Fair Districts supports the creation of an independent redistricting commission to reform Pennsylvania politics. You can learn more about how to support redistricting reform at FairDistrictsPA.com or by e-mailing info@fairdistrictspa.com. As the website states, "Democracy means voters choose their politicians. Current Pennsylvania law lets politicians choose their voters."

Michael Bucell, northwest coordinator for Fair Districts PA, is encouraged that people who heard Kuniholm speak at the Jefferson in Erie and Corry have stepped up to volunteer to send postcards to legislators and advocate in other ways for redistricting reform.

If you need more incentive to get involved in defending democracy, KOLP urges people to attend the Lake Effect Film Festival to watch *Save Blasco!* You can also watch the film, narrated by retired Mercyhurst professor Chris Magoc, on YouTube.

For a quick dose of hopeful inspiration, scroll toward the end of the 40-minute film and listen to the theme song, "Where Do We Go," written and sung by John McCartney, who performs under the name John Bueno.

The son of Anna and Hugh McCartney, he wrote the song two years ago but it perfectly fits this moment. The song also reflects the courage of people like Paulette Hessinger, who decided to jump in and organize Erie Indivisible after determining that "I really want to be visible," she said.

In his catchy tune, Bueno sings: "Home is on the Great Lakes ... where I make my stand."

The song is an easy listen with a hard challenge: Where will you make your stand?

Liz Allen wrote "Protect Free Speech and Freedom of the Press" on her sign and illustrated it with a reporter's notebook. She can be reached at lizerie@aol.com.

Erie's Schools Enter a New Era

Governance to set direction, leadership to bring it to life, accountability to ensure it lasts

By: Dr. Jay Breneman (JB), Dr. Natalyn Gibbs (NG), and Ms. ShaQuita Gatewood (SG)

As a parent with three children in Erie's Public Schools and as President of the Board of Directors, I see this fall as more than the start of another year. We are opening the doors to a new chapter.

In recent years, our board has prepared the way for a historic national superintendent search – one marked by rigor, transparency, and broad participation. It was more than a hiring decision; it was a statement of how this community expects its schools to be led.

The outcome is the appointment of Dr. Natalyn Gibbs, a superintendent whose leadership is grounded in both vision and heart, and whose work begins with listening and building trust.

This moment is not about replacing what came before, but about building on it. Generations of teachers, staff, and administrators have carried Erie's schools through difficult decades of underfunding and inequity. Today, even as we remain more than \$90 million short of what our families and classrooms are owed by the state, we are beginning to see the resources and strategies to match our students' potential. That combination – improved governance, new leadership, new resources, and the voices of those who learn, teach, and live in Erie – is what sets this year apart.

We also took a hard look at our own work. For the first time in more than 30 years, we rewrote every district policy and established clear processes to ensure decisions are consistent and transparent. We created a Governance Committee to hold ourselves accountable, strengthen our partnership with the superintendent, and focus on long-term goals instead of day-to-day management. And it means expanding opportunities for students to lead – like our new Student Leadership Program, which will bring voices from all three high schools (Erie High, Collegiate Academy, and Patrick J. DiPaolo Student Success Center) into the boardroom.

That shift created a new culture: directors who stay connected to what's happening on the ground while lead-



School Superintendent Dr. Natalyn Gibbs ushers in students on the first day of school as they walk the red carpet to their classrooms. Gibbs is actively working with Board President Jay Breneman and newly appointed Chief Accountability Officer ShaQuita Gatewood to stay connected with students and make changes based on their needs.

ing strategically from the board table. Strong governance gives us a foundation, but policies and goals alone don't change a child's experience in school. To make that foundation real in classrooms and hallways, you need leadership who can shape systems while building up people. That is why we turned to Dr. Gibbs. – JB

Leading With Heart and Determination

When I was named superintendent, I knew Erie's Public Schools were ready for a new chapter – and I knew we couldn't wait until July to begin. On April 1, I joined the district and immediately launched a 100-day plan. It was a roadmap not just for the hard work ahead, but what I call the "heart" work. That meant showing up in schools and neighborhoods, listening

carefully to students, staff, and families, and beginning to build the trust that lasting change depends on.

Since then, I've been in classrooms and cafeterias, hosting listening sessions, and walking hallways to understand the daily realities our students face. This fall, we held the district's first convocation in more than a decade, and for only the third time in as many decades – not as a formality, but as a reminder that every adult in Erie's Public Schools has a part in shaping the success of our students.

People often notice my energy, but what matters most is determination. I try to remember every face and every detail, because every detail belongs to someone's child. That mindset comes from my years teaching and leading in Nashville where I saw firsthand how much of a difference it

made when teachers knew their students and invested in their growth – and how quickly opportunities could close when they didn’t.

I found my calling in third grade in the form of one of my favorite teachers, Mrs. Judy Ace, one of those transformational people who enter your life and make a permanent impression. I felt like she walked on water; she studied her craft and made learning come alive. Every student was a learner and leader in their space – whether it was using manipulatives or building volcanoes, you were learning in everything that you did. She pushed me to my potential but also maintained the joy of teaching and learning.

And that’s what it’s about: experiences. Experiences matter. It’s about personalizing experiences for both students and adults, and that starts with building relationships. My leadership begins with people first. If we create schools where students are seen, valued, and supported, results will follow.

My vision for Erie is simple but urgent: every student should graduate prepared for college, career, and life. That means stronger core instruction in reading, math, and science. It means building a culture of mentorship and collaboration, where staff are supported and trusted.

But vision and energy alone are not enough. They need to be tested, measured, and refined. That’s why one of my first recommendations was the creation of a Chief Accountability

Officer — to make sure our progress is visible, transparent, and real. – NG

Turning Promises Into Proof

Leadership sets the vision, but progress only becomes real when we can see it, measure it, and trust it. That is the work of accountability.

When Dr. Gibbs recommended the creation of this role, it was because she understood that Erie needed more than hope – we needed systems that could turn promises into proof. As the district’s first Chief Accountability Officer, I am here to make sure that our goals aren’t just words on paper, but realities felt in every classroom and household.

That means something different for everyone. For a **teacher**, accountability means having clear, timely information on how their students are doing, so they can adapt lessons and celebrate growth. For a **principal**, it means being able to track attendance, climate, and achievement in ways that help them lead proactively instead of reacting when it’s too late. For a **parent**, it means straightforward updates – not jargon – about whether resources are reaching their child. For a **student**, it means knowing their experiences matter and that they are not invisible. And for the **board**, it means having reliable evidence to guide decisions and ensure that long-term goals stay on track.

As a child growing up in an urban community, I vividly recall traveling 45 minutes each morning to attend my elementary school. One of my earliest

experiences occurred on my first day in Mrs. Freeman’s classroom. Although I was a great distance from home and one of only a few students who looked like me, Mrs. Freeman cultivated a structured learning environment in which I never felt different. She consistently welcomed me with warmth while maintaining a classroom culture that was both rigorous and supportive. Within this space, I was able to develop academically as well as socially and emotionally. My identity was no longer confined to being “a student from the Northern Community,” instead, I was recognized as a child with aspirations worthy of cultivation, regardless of my zip code.

It was through her example that I discovered my own calling. Inspired by her unwavering care and uncompromising expectations, I chose to dedicate my life to education. My purpose is to serve as a voice for those who may not always be heard and to ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive – academically, socially, and emotionally. That lesson has never left me: accountability isn’t just about numbers, it’s about whether children feel like they matter. Those experiences convinced me that accountability has to mean more than compliance. It must drive action, build trust, and create the kind of clarity that empowers teachers, families, and leaders to work together for better outcomes.

That’s what this role is about: making sure our progress is visible and our direction is clear, so no child is left be-

hind in the gap between intention and reality. – SG

Building Excellence Together

Erie’s Public Schools don’t exist apart from the city; they are woven into its fabric. When our schools thrive, neighborhoods grow stronger and families choose to stay. When they falter, the whole community feels it.

What we are building now is more than a new plan or leadership team. It is a culture where excellence is the expectation, where every adult owns a piece of our students’ success, and where trust is earned through openness and follow-through. That culture has a name: **#BuildingExcellenceTogether**.

But it cannot be built by leadership alone. It will take parents who show up to listening sessions, students who raise their voices through the new Student Leadership Program, teachers and staff who bring their expertise, and taxpayers who believe in the value of public education.

The truth is simple: Erie cannot rise without strong public schools. And strong schools are not built by chance; they are built by intention, collaboration, and persistence. This is our charge as leaders, and our invitation to you. Walk with us, challenge us, and help us create the schools our children – and our city – deserve.

Dr. Jay Breneman, President of the Board of School Directors; Dr. Natalyn Gibbs, Superintendent; and ShaQuita Gatewood, Chief Accountability Officer, all serve Erie’s Public Schools.



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United Way's Safer Walking Routes Initiative

Community, safety, and public art contribute to helping kids get to school

By: Alana Sabol

Summer has come to a close and Erie kids are now walking to school. United Way of Erie County and the Erie Public Schools are making sure they're getting there safely through the Safer Walking Routes Initiative. The program is a collaborative effort between several organizations in Erie, including Gannon University and the Erie Data Center.

Executive Vice President of United Way Erie County Mike Jaruszewicz explained that there are a range of non-academic barriers that students face, including reliable and safe transportation and walking routes. "We found early on was that there are a lot of students that need to walk to and from school every day, but there are a lot of environmental barriers that were impacting their ability to either want to go to school or just to get there, even if they wanted to," Jaruszewicz said. The initiative began in 2018 when United Way wrote a grant to the Erie Community Foundation to support a safer walking program that combined education, awareness, and data. From then on, they have worked to expand the initiative through collaborative efforts and grant funding. In the summer of 2023, a grant from PennDOT "funded the expansion of the safer walking routes to all of the elementary schools and also ... for the educational awareness campaign," Jaruszewicz said.

United Way worked with Dr. Christopher Magno and his students at Gannon University to map out the safest walking routes using GIS technology. They identified hazards and areas in need of improvements, such as employing crossing guards or placing school zone signage. "We know resources are limited. It's not like we're going to be able to transform every street in the City of Erie, but if we could direct students to the safer areas and then work as a community to prioritize improvements and enhancements on top of those routes, then we could start having more of an impact," Jaruszewicz said.

Jaruszewicz emphasized how collaboration between various partners has made the program successful and recognized at the National Community School Conference. "We've worked really hard because resources are limited," he said. "Other communities in Pennsylvania are probably in the same boat as we are in terms of public school funding and allocating those funds to making sure kids are getting to school, so it's really great to be the foundation for that."

The initiative also focused on beautifying the walking routes with help from Erie Arts and Culture, who installed 15 murals along the walking paths. Referencing the Pennsylvania Youth Survey, Jaruszewicz explained that



Students often face many unsafe barriers when walking to school, including poorly cleared sidewalks and icy conditions in the wintertime. The United Way is combating these barriers with their Safer Walking Routes initiative.

students may exhibit more problem behaviors if they don't feel attached to their neighborhoods. "There's a lot of vandalism in public spaces, they don't feel safe, and research shows that there's this direct impact between those environmental factors and success."

Additionally, the program encourages community involvement like keeping sidewalks clear in the winter and picking up trash. "Students are walking to school and we all have a role to play to keep kids safe by slow-

ing down, clearing sidewalks, and reporting things that are not safe," Jaruszewicz said. "We can build that framework, we can raise awareness, but it's going to take every person to play a role."

For more information on how you can help keep your walking route safe, visit unitedwayerie.org/our-impact/student-success/safer-walking-routes/

Alana Sabol can be reached at alana@eriereader.com



9/17* MATEWAN
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



9/24* THE BIBI FILES
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 seizes opportunity in Bibi's weakness, and the dominoes fall. 2025. Documentary. Not Rated.



10/1 THE GIRL WITH THE NEEDLE
With Dear Neighbor: The Legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph, an Erie-made short film by MenajErie Studio at 6:00 PM
OSCAR NOMINEE Copenhagen 1919: A young worker finds herself unemployed and pregnant. She meets Dagmar, who runs an underground adoption agency. A strong connection grows, but her world shatters when she stumbles upon the shocking truth behind her work. 2024. Drama. Not Rated.



10/8* CLOUD
An ambitious yet directionless Tokyo factory worker, who side-hustles in the murky realm of black market e-commerce, cheating buyers and sellers alike, begins to suspect that his former victims could be plotting the ultimate revenge. Director Kiyoshi Kurosawa (Curse, Pulse) examines themes of technology being a haunting force, humanity's capacity for greed, and the quiet ways the internet can further mutate those diseases in us. 2025. Horror/Action. Rated R.

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Justice for Chello Coalition Seeks Answers, Demands Transparency

Two months after the fatal shooting, no arrests have been made and questions remain

By: Alana Sabol

The death of Marchello Woodard, a 43-year-old father with weeks left of parole, left the Erie community in shock. Now, nearly a month after Woodard was shot multiple times by a Pennsylvania state parole officer on July 2, family and friends are left waiting for answers and justice.

The Justice for Chello Coalition was formed “to find justice, share information, educate, and make long lasting change,” according to the group’s Facebook page. It consists of seven individuals: Terry and Jerry Roberts, Deonte Cooley, Malcolm Pullium, Craig Woodard Sr., and Cyndi Treiber. Several members are related to or were close friends with Woodard. Treiber worked in the military for several years with experience in crisis management and worked on an investigative project on active duty military deaths – Treiber wanted to lend her knowledge and experience to the cause. “We all just sat down and we said, okay, we’re going to do whatever we have to do in an organized manner, with integrity, to get justice for Chello, and that’s what we’ve been doing,” Treiber said.

Since Woodard’s death, the coalition has been involved in organizing protests, sitting in and speaking at council meetings, and writing to the Erie County District Attorney. I had a chance to speak with Treiber about the coalition, Marchello, the homicide, the investigation, and what we, as a community, can do to prevent this from happening again.

The community has many questions and misgivings about how the investigation has been handled thus far. Since the shooting, members of the Justice for Chello Coalition have spoken at both Erie City and Erie County Council meetings, encouraging city and county officials to advocate for justice and transparency during the investigation. “I think the Brown and Black community are feeling dismissed. They feel that this would not have happened if the roles of race were reversed. Unfortunately, when you have a lack of transparency, people feel unheard and then they get angry and that’s where people are right now,” Treiber said.

On Aug. 8, nationally-known attorney Ben Crump hosted a press conference at the Second Baptist Church in Erie to address Woodard’s death. Crump is a renowned civil rights lawyer, having represented families of Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, those affected by the Flint Water Crisis, and more. Crump thanked the coalition for securing a video of the incident that allegedly “contradicts the narrative of the patrol officers, because the video speaks for itself. They’ve been selling this false narrative that said the officer’s life was in danger because he was being dragged [by Woodard’s car], but you see those three shots ring out, and the car hasn’t moved.”

The video, which was captured by a neighbor’s doorbell camera, was called “the most important piece of evidence” by Crump.

The fiscal year 2023-2024 state budget provided \$1.5 million dollars for body cameras for State Field Supervision in Pennsylvania and Act 53 of 2023 was passed in both the House and the Senate to authorize parole officers to wear body cameras. However, no body camera footage from the shooting is publicly available. “The guys should have the cams, which would’ve made this an open-and-shut, one-day case,” Treiber said. Parole officers in Pennsylvania are allowed to wear body-worn cameras, but are not required to do so.

There is legislation in Pennsylvania regarding bias complaints against parole officers, too.

Governor Josh Shapiro started the Citizen Law Enforcement Advisory and Review (CLEAR) Commission in response to a bias-based complaint against the state parole board by a parolee’s mother. “There’s already an entire system in place for addressing these issues so we would like to see Governor Shapiro step up and say, ‘This is exactly why I created the CLEAR commission and this is what I’m going to do.’ We would like that to get plugged into our field office for sure.” When the Erie Reader reached out to Shapiro’s office for comment, they did not provide any and instead directed us to the Pennsylvania State Police.

Fifty-seven days after the shoot-

CONTRIBUTED



The folks organizing the Justice for Chello movement want the public to recognize the unnecessary loss of life and all those affected by the shooting death of Marchello Woodard – a proud father, coach, and volunteer.

ing, on Aug. 28, Erie County District Attorney Elizabeth Hirz released an updated statement on the investigation, saying:

“The Erie County District Attorney’s Office has received investigative materials from the Pennsylvania State Police regarding the death of Marchello Woodard and is currently reviewing them. Additional follow-up and continued collaboration with the Pennsylvania State Police will be necessary, and at this stage, no determination has been made. We acknowledge and understand the community’s frustration regarding the length of the ongoing investigation.

However, we want to assure the public that we, in collaboration with the Pennsylvania State Police, are continuing to conduct a comprehensive and thorough investigation.

We recognize the importance of transparency and appreciate the community’s desire for answers. However, to protect the integrity of the investigation and ensure justice is properly served, we are unable to release specific details.

We ask for your continued patience and trust as we work to uncover the full truth. These investigations take time. Our priority and commitment remain to ensuring this investigation is

CONTRIBUTED



The organizers of the Justice for Chello movement have arranged multiple protests and have attended city and county council meetings en masse, as they continue to advocate for transparency, answers, and ultimately, justice.

handled with the diligence, professionalism, and care that our community deserves.

As stated previously, once the investigation is complete and our legal review is concluded, we will communicate the outcome to the family first,

"I think the Brown and Black community are feeling dismissed ... when you have a lack of transparency, people feel unheard and then they get angry and that's where people are right now." – Cyndi Treiber of the Justice for Chello Coalition

and then to the public." In response to the DA, the coalition responded in part saying, "We are hopeful this will be a new start to a more fluid communication as a means to show the community their needs and concerns are being heard." They also requested a meeting with Hirz to "facilitate further conversation and not to discuss any investigative details."

Treiber reflected on the community's loss of Marchello Woodard, and how his death continues to affect his friends, family, and those advocating for him. "Marchello had three kids; he was an excellent father and was extraordinarily involved and invested in his children. All of his kids are on the ball. He volunteered in the community, he coached a basketball team and bought every single kid on the team new sneakers," Treiber said.

Alana Sabol can be reached at alana@eriereader.com

Student Leadership Program Bridges Gap Between Students and Board

New initiative helps students' voices be heard at school board meetings

By: Ally Kutz

Making decisions that directly impact students in the district, the Erie School Board noticed a missing piece of the puzzle that they sought to fill. "The student's empty seat at the dais was a constant reminder that we had work to do," said Jay Breneman, President of the Erie School Board.

In the past, a rotating student from each of the district's high schools was invited to sit in on board meetings to share feedback with the group from their peers. Since then, the effort evolved into the creation of the Spirit Council, which has now grown into the newly developed Student Leadership Program (SLP) launching this school year.

Breneman took much into consideration to bring the SLP to life: "After several board members expressed interest, I worked with principals to help arrange meetings with several student groups to ask, 'What would make this student role on the school board more meaningful?'" Breneman said. "I listened and shared their ideas and consulted the National Student Board Member Association (NSBMA) as well before creating and finalizing a proposal at the end of last school year."

The SLP will be made up of student liaisons from each of the area's three high schools – Erie High, Collegiate Academy, and the PJD Student Success Center, the district's hybrid/online program. Although they will be non-voting members, these students

"[The Student Leadership Program] gives students meaningful, hands-on experience in governance. It's an opportunity for young leaders to explore pathways in civic engagement and leadership development." – Jay Breneman, President of the Erie School Board

will act as a bridge between their school and the board and will be able to bring forward new perspectives, issues, and ideas that may have otherwise gone unnoticed or unheard.

Selection of the student representatives involves each school's administrative team taking applications from those interested in serving as a liaison. This process involves applicants completing a short submission that outlines their interest in the pro-

DON WROCKOWSKI



The budding Erie School District initiative known as the Student Leadership Program gives representation at school board meetings to student representatives from all of the area high schools, bringing a first-hand account of students' viewpoints and experiences to the board.

gram, followed by interviews with administrators. From there, the student representatives are chosen. "This selection process ensures that liaisons are not only motivated but also prepared to take on the responsibility of representing their peers, engaging in meaningful discussions, and report-

and leadership development." Representatives for the 2025-2026 school year include Carmen, Arpana, and Shayla from Erie High; Aleah and Plies from PJD; and Autumn, Hawo, and Jenna from Collegiate Academy. In August, the Collegiate Academy student liaisons participated in a virtual conference with the NSBMA.

Although this is the program's inaugural year it is already being lauded, with the school board winning an award for innovation from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) which will be awarded at the association's annual conference in October.

For more information on the Student Leadership Program, visit the Erie School Board's Board Docs at go.boarddocs.com/pa/eriesd/Board.nsf/Public

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

Bird of the Month: Cedar Waxwing

The “spark” bird that caused a lifelong obsession

By: Mary Birdsong

The Cedar Waxwing is one of the most beautifully elegant birds in North America, in my opinion. But I could be biased because it is the bird that made me a birder.

My Cedar Waxwing came to me at Boat Launch #4 on the lagoons at Presque Isle where my then-boyfriend Mike and I were picnicking (now married 23 years). We saw birds perching that we could not identify. The next picnic we brought along my dad’s old Sears & Roebuck binoculars.

I literally gasped when I finally got a good look at a perched waxwing. I didn’t know I could see such a beautiful bird right where I lived. We were immediately hooked.

That first bird that captivates and leads to a nearly unquenchable curiosity for all things avian is called a “spark bird.” Ask anyone who looks at birds regularly and they will relate to you their spark bird story.

The Cedar Waxwing’s elegance comes from feathers that appear as smooth and as rich as velvet. Similar in size to an American Robin, both male and females sport brown on the head, neck, and throat, yellow on

the lower belly, and have a back that starts brown transitioning to gray on the rump and black on the tail. Its additional field marks add the wow: A crest tops its head like a cardinal, a black “mask” with white trim covers its eyes, a broad yellow tip adorns its tail and small bright red waxy projections are at the tips of two or three wing feathers closest to the body (called the secondaries), which is where waxwings get their name. According to Cornell’s *Birds of the World*, these red deposits come from a carotenoid pigment called astaxanthin, which they obtain from eating berries, their primary food source.

And no one really knows what the function of the tips is. It was once theorized the red tips functioned to protect feather shafts of secondaries from wear experienced during waxwing’s fluttering among branches of cedar trees, but that has been debunked. Ornithologists suspect that these bright red (rarely yellow) deposits may be important status signals in mate selection.

Now, as summer fades and fall comes on, is a great time to watch



Read more about Mary Birdsong’s “spark bird,” the Cedar Waxwing, in this month’s Bird of the Month column. This often elusive fruit-eating bird has curiously red, wax-like carotenoid deposits on its wings, confounding ornithologists and contributing to their allure.

for Cedar Waxwings. They nest later in the year – and are thus more active now – to take advantage of ripening fruits to feed their young, rather than the insects many other birds rely on.

If you go in search of them, may I suggest Boat Launch #4 at Presque

Isle? Be sure to take binoculars. It could be the start of something exhilarating.

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

Take Your Beer for a Walk: Federal Hill

An old school, a big hill, and some great grub to go with those suds

By: Jeff McCullor

Lace up those sneakers and snag yourself a local barley pop; it’s time to take your beer for a walk! This month we’re starting in the historic Federal Hill area south of downtown, centered at the intersection of West 26th and Peach streets.

We’ll begin our trek at the southeast corner of this important and busy intersection so we can scope out all the public art. First, the tattoo-inspired mural on the north side of Ink Assassins can definitely provide some inspiration for your next stop in to decorate your epidermis. Next, shift your gaze northwards across West 26th and you’ll see an impressive mural stating “Welcome to Federal Hill.” Wouldn’t it be great if more neighborhoods had public art like this? Cheers to you, mural folks!

Next we’ll let our nose guide us while performing an about-face. As we walk south along Peach Street, follow the lovely smoky scent of Federal Hill Smokehouse, one of our town’s best barbecue spots. If it’s early in their day you’ll see a line of hungry customers waiting for some smoked turkey (my favorite), brisket, or to chat about Wrestlemania from the best days of pro wrestling with owner Ryan Atzert. Cheers to you, Federal Hill Smokehouse!

You’ve been taking sips of your beer so far right? I figured you’re a pro at this by now but just in case, this a great time for replenishment.

Next stop, the Raven Sound building – or as it was once called, The Franklin School, Public School Number 9. Located right next to



Take a boozy lil walk with brewery owner Jeff McCullor as he explores some of the fun spots in the midtown district of Federal Hill – including the eponymous barbecue, a former public school building, and the Best of Erie sweeper Bro Man’s Birria N’ Burger Joint.

Federal Hill Smokehouse, this is a great example of the “it was a good idea at the time” form of construction with the original brick school building, standing tall atop the hill, featuring a 1980s-style plaza addition on the front. First opened in 1891, it had eight rooms consisting of 396 seats. It’s now home to a bunch of small businesses. Cheers to you, small business community!

From here we’ll continue south on Peach to the next intersection, turning left onto Hill Road, aptly named because it includes a Pittsburgh-esque grade all the way down to Glenwood Park Avenue where we’ll turn left,

heading north until we stop in front of Bro Man’s Birria ‘n Burger Joint. From their humble food truck beginnings, these bros opened two locations in Erie, the Glenwood location being quite literally in the center of our burger-loving town. Stop in for a Sooner Burger or 3-pack of the Diablo Quesabirria Tacos; they pair perfectly with your pint. Cheers to you, Bro Man’s!

Thanks for coming on a walk with me. Keep drinking, and walking, local.

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

The Reader Beat Monthly Recap

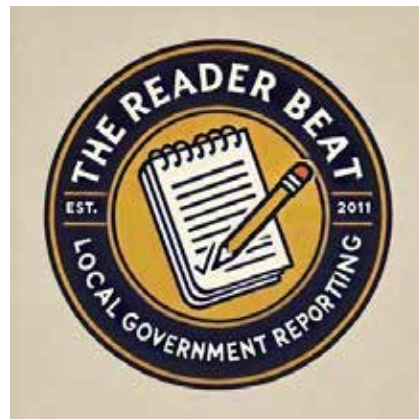
Summary of August 2025 Council Meetings

By: Alana Sabol

The Reader Beat aims to cover city and county council meetings as well as other important government and community-related meetings. A repeated concern during the August council meetings was the ongoing investigation of the shooting of Marchello Woodard by a state parole officer on July 2. The following is a summary of each meeting for the month of August:

City Council August 6: During the first city council meeting of the month, many constituents came to advocate for the Erie Zoo and share their opinions on the two resolutions council presented. Resolution 1 proposed that the city provide \$500,000 to the zoo annually. Alternatively, Resolution 2 proposed that the city partner with Erie Events and relinquish financial control over the zoo. Following a myriad of public comments, city council decided to remove Resolution 1 from the agenda.

Peggy Seib, a teacher at the zoo, commended the zookeepers and spoke about the love for the animals from those working at the zoo to those visiting. “You don’t know what you have until you don’t have it,” Seib said. Councilmember Ed Brzezinski said, “As much as we love the zoo, we shouldn’t be running it. Let’s give it to the pros,” referring to Erie Events, who run venues such as UPMC Park and the Warner Theatre. A resolution accepting the proposal



of Erie Events regarding operation of the Erie Zoo as described in the July 23, 2025 letter from Attorney James Walczak to City Solicitor Edward Betz and recommending the approval to the Mayor passed unanimously with an uproar of applause from the audience.

County Council August 12: The Justice for Chello Coalition and other constituents came to ask for support and an official statement addressing the death of Marchello Woodard. Councilmember Andre Horton addressed the room, sympathizing with the community, and expressing frustration and grief. “If anyone wants justice for Chello or for any other family in Erie County, it would be someone like me who has had two sons murdered in this county in an 18-month period,” Horton said. The councilman also encouraged the constituents to vote and

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stay involved. “You’re raising your voice here, that’s great,” Horton said. “We need to step up, our vote is our voice.”

City Council August 20: All public comments during the city council meeting addressed the shooting of Marchello Woodard. Constituent Deonte Cooley explained that the names of the alleged suspects have still not been released and once again asked for contin-

ued advocacy. During public comments, Councilmember Tyler Titus said that tension will continue to build in the city as long as there is a lack of transparency. An ordinance amending Article 101, authorizing a referendum on the question of studying the existing form of government and considering the advisability of the adoption of an optional form of government or preserving the home rule charter for the City of Erie was passed unanimously.

County Council August 26: The county council meeting included discussions about the Marchello Woodard case and the upcoming budget. Constituents expressed their frustration at the ongoing investigation and the lack of information being revealed to the public, particularly the name of the officer that shot Woodard. “The justice system is failing our community,” said constituent Malcolm Pullium. Some speakers urged the coun-

cil to hold a town hall and encourage the district attorney and state representatives to be more transparent. Constituent Chanel Caljean referenced Erie County’s history of redlining and offering fewer educational and financial opportunities for Black residents. Councilmember Andre Horton mentioned the need for Erie residents to get involved with the budget hearings, mentioning they historically have low attendance from the public. “In

35 days [County Executive Brenton Davis] is going to hand us around a \$600 million budget and you’re not going to see Black and Brown communities in it anywhere.”

Coming up this month:
County Council: Tuesday, Sept. 9 at 6 p.m.

City Council: Wednesday, Sept. 17 at 6:30 p.m.

County Council: Tuesday, Sept. 23 at 6 p.m.

Making a Small City Smaller: Exploring the Urban Experience in Erie

PEVs, accessible transport, and the war on the poor

By: Dave Tamulonis

My friend recently upgraded his e-bike and sold me his older model. My experience with personal electric vehicles (PEVs) was limited before taking a leap and buying this machine; I had only really ridden one e-bike before while in Philadelphia using their bike share program. Though e-bikes are the most common form of PEV, the moniker also applies to things like electric scooters, electric skateboards, hoverboards, and one-wheels, which are a form of electric unicycle. To be honest, I fell into the camp of traditional cyclists who thought PEVs basically ruined one of the main benefits of commuter cycling, which is building exercise into one’s regular routine. That said, I will admit, riding an e-bike is an absolute blast, especially when exploring an unfamiliar city. I probably did 25 miles in Philly without even realizing it. I was ready to change my mind and figure out how this new technology could help me get around Erie and become even less dependent on my car.

E-bikes fall into three categories:

- Pedal-assist bikes that largely retain the experience of riding a traditional bicycle and tend to look more like a traditional bicycle with slim frames and hidden batteries.
- Handlebar throttle bikes that inch toward the feel of a moped or motorcycle, and tend to have higher top speeds, bulkier batteries for extended range, and heavier frames and bodies.

- Hybrids, which give you the option for both throttle-assisted and pedal-assisted modes.

The bike I bought is a hybrid but is relatively powerful, with a top speed approaching 25 mph on its highest setting. My first time laying this thing out on a street (East Lake Road in Lawrence Park) felt like driving a motorcycle. The acceleration was shockingly powerful, and the bike is pretty heavy and bulky.

The friend I purchased this from got into e-bikes as an alternative to automobiles for getting around town to work and the gym. He’s in recovery and unable to acquire a driver’s license due to past drug convictions, but needs a way to commute to his job across town so he can continue to rebuild his life and provide for his family. One’s ability to access this city drastically improves when you go from a self-powered traditional bicycle that tops out at 15 mph or so to a battery-powered electric vehicle that can effortlessly accelerate to 25 or 30 mph. This has been a trend in cities across the country, and in the past year or so Erie seems to have caught up in a big way. Our city, with its relatively flat roads, few major barriers like freeways cutting through town, robust public bus transportation system, and growing amount of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, is the perfect type of city in which to own a PEV. Many in larger cities use PEVs to cover the “last mile” of a commute, the



Dave Tamulonis, affectionately known around town as Downtown Dave, takes on the recent explosion in the popularity of PEVs (personal electric vehicles) – examining their safety, our infrastructure, and how their banning disproportionately affects poor communities.

gap between bus or subway stops and your actual destination. In a city where everything you need is only about 2 or 3 miles away, it becomes possible to rely solely on a powerful e-bike or scooter.

Just like any hobby, there is a huge range of affordability in the PEV market, running from bikes that can be purchased at Walmart for a few hundred dollars to very high-end models that can get into the thousands. All e-bikes, though, are much cheaper than pretty much any reliable gas-powered automobile, especially in Pennsylvania where it is shockingly expensive to keep up with owning a

car. When you add up car payments, insurance, registration and licensing fees, inspection fees, repairs to keep up with inspections, and other regular costs and maintenance for a car like gas and routine oil changes, owning a vehicle in Pennsylvania has become a luxury. I have had multiple stretches where I’ve driven a car with an expired inspection because I had to save up to make the necessary repairs and chancing a ticket is a cheaper date. I grew up in Ohio, and while I will admit many vehicles that should not be on roads were legally allowed to be driven, it was not quite as expensive to keep up with owning a car. This new

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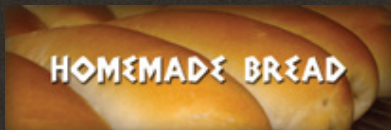
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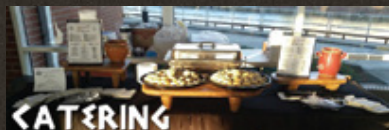
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technology therefore is a major benefit to those living at or near poverty, allowing them the ability to cover more ground without having to invest in an expensive gas vehicle. This has important and immediate benefits for our economy. According to a 2022 survey conducted by the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce, almost 20 percent of individuals in that state who were able to work but were not currently working cited transportation as a barrier. Making transportation more accessible and affordable could help solve issues like labor shortages.

Lately, lawmakers have been catching up and deciding how to regulate this new class of vehicles that sits uncomfortably between self-powered and motor-powered, especially those that are increasingly powerful due to leaps in battery strength and endurance. Many cities have either full or partial bans on e-bikes or scooters. Some target the more powerful bikes,

and some have blanket bans that attempt to eliminate them all together. Many places are restricting where they can be driven; Gannon University right here in Erie recently banned all PEVs on their sidewalks and walkways. Let me first say that driving a PEV on the sidewalk or other pedestrian walkway is always unsafe. In a healthy city with good infrastructure, pedestrians should have a space just for walking that is safe and free from motorized or self-powered traffic. A healthy city would also have *abundant* and separate infrastructure for bikes and PEVs, though. This is something Erie has yet to implement. While there are a few bike lanes on Erie streets, none are protected bike lanes. The few trails that are separate from the road are meant to be shared with pedestrians like the Bayfront Connector Greenway Trail and the West Bayfront Bluffs Promenade Trail. This lack of infrastructure often forces bicycle and PEV traffic onto the sidewalks, espe-

cially those less experienced riders that do not feel comfortable sharing 35 mph streets with car traffic. I would describe myself as an extremely assertive and confident cyclist, and I always try to assert my place on the street alongside vehicular traffic if riding my bike. The more bikes that compete for space on the road, the more cars are made aware of them and will (theoretically) look out for them the next time.

While the street is currently the legal space for PEV traffic, it is far from safe. Car drivers are at best unfamiliar with how to handle bicycle and PEV riders and at worst outright hostile to them on Erie roads. Instead of making the road a safer space for these riders, many cities' impulse is to instead regulate the new technology and limit their ability to impact the car drivers. The hypocrisy of many elected officials who claim to be "anti-regulation" shows whenever a new technology stands to benefit the poor, and therefore must be thoroughly

and carefully neutered. The auto industry also has a long history of lobbying to protect gas-guzzling interests at the expense of public transit (see the 1949 General Motors Streetcar conspiracy). The odds are sadly stacked against the affordable and environmentally friendly PEVs in their many shapes and forms, but small cities like Erie are poised to set the precedent for how we discuss this new technology at the state and federal level. If we understand how PEVs can boost participation in our economy, democratize our streets, and reduce dependence on polluting gas vehicles, and we properly invest in the infrastructure that makes riding them safe and easy, we could significantly improve the quality of life in Erie.

Plus, they're just really fun to ride.

David Tamulon is a musician and educator who works at Erie Downtown Partnership managing community events and activities in Downtown Erie. He can be reached at davidtamulon@gmail.com.

Edwina Tries... A Canning Class

End of summer is the perfect time to learn how to preserve food

By: Edwina Capozziello

We are coming upon the magical time of year where mysterious zucchini from your neighbors shows up on your porch, where you can get BOGO berries everywhere, and co-workers leave bags of tomatoes in common areas for the taking. Bumper crop season is upon us and there's no better time to learn how to save the summer bounty in ways that can help you enjoy it when the days inevitably get shorter.

I dipped my toes into what the kids are calling "Grannycore" long before it was trending. I like to bake, crochet, arrange wildflowers, and grow tomatoes and herbs in backyard garden boxes as much as the next gal. But, I have always been a little scared of preserving food – afraid that I would do it wrong and make my loved ones and myself sick. So when I saw that the Erie Food Policy Advisory Council (Erie FPAC) was hosting a free community class on preserving local and seasonal fruits, I knew I had to try it and report back to you.

The class took place at Erie FPAC's 4th Street Community Farm, which is a collaboration between Groundwork

Erie and Emmaus Ministries, smack dab in the lower east side at Fourth and German streets, one of Erie's urban farm spaces that demonstrates the principle that you don't need a huge space to grow food. The outdoor classroom was inviting under shady trees and I joined an eclectic mix of eager and smiling students.

Stephanie Thauer of Raintree Farm had a cool outdoor kitchen set up with a camp stove and prep table. Thauer was kind, open to questions, and quickly made me feel confident that I could do this canning thing. We all took turns doing different prep work on a local blueberry and peach jam while Thauer explained processes not only for the jam that we were making, but how to safely preserve other fruits, vegetables, and herbs. She encouraged us to continue to use and pass down preservation practices, trading and sharing as a tie to the earth, to family, to community.

By the end of the class I'd dubbed her "The Poet Farmer" and I was truly inspired.

For me, the highlight of the class and what really drove home the



This month, Edwina tries a free community class hosted by Erie Food Policy Advisory Council that teaches attendees how to make the most of their summer harvest by canning and preserving their bounty.

messages was a lovely, friendly neighborhood mom and her mini-me child (who was probably around six years old). Seeing a child so eager to learn, to be involved, asking questions, and sharing her own knowledge with the rest of the class, noticing and enjoying everything that was around ... well, I think that's what a community farm is all about.

Check out more Erie FPAC offerings and information on Facebook (Erie Food Policy Advisory Council) or on Instagram (@eriefpac)

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

Gem City Style: Dr. Chris Gray, Founding President of the Erie County Community College

A Q&A on the college’s meteoric rise, its progressive model, and the power of confidence

By: Jessica Hunter

Erie’s newest educational landmark, the Erie County Community College (EC3), has survived its unconventional birth during the COVID-19 pandemic – and thrived. I sat down with President Chris Gray to learn about his own unexpected path to the presidency, the college’s remarkable growth, and its unapologetic mission to disrupt the traditional higher education landscape.

For EC3’s president, the journey began not in an office, but in a classroom as a student. “I’m a community college student,” Dr. Gray says with a smile, a title he holds with pride. He recounts how he first enrolled at a local community college to impress a girl, a story that took an unexpected turn. “She dumped me about three weeks in, but it was the greatest mistake of my life, because it really opened my world, immediately.” This moment sparked a lifelong dedication to education, culminating in his decision to say “yes” to starting a brand new college.

When Dr. Gray came on board in July 2021, the timeline was daunting. Under political pressure, EC3’s founding board decided to enroll students immediately. “The absolute chaos was real,” he says, remembering the rush to have classes ready by September. But the move was intentional: once students were in classrooms, the college’s existence was undeniable.

Since its inception, the college’s growth has been staggering. EC3 currently serves over 800 students, meaning “one out of every 350 residents in Erie County is right now registered in class.” Dr. Gray sees this as just the beginning, projecting an eventual population of 3,000 to 5,000 students, which would make EC3 the largest education provider in northwest Pennsylvania.

The most rewarding part? The stories. “People say, ‘Well, what do you guys teach there?’ And I say, ‘We teach confidence.’” Dr. Gray shares the story of a recent graduate who was a CNC operator at a local manufacturing plant. After taking IT courses at EC3, he went back to his company with newfound skills and was offered a position in the IT department. It’s a powerful example of the community college’s promise: “This company is filling these much-needed jobs because they came here and got some base training.”

For many of these students, EC3 is their first step into higher education. “We often say students don’t know how to college here,” Dr. Gray notes, sharing his own story of not knowing what “financial aid” was. This is the core of their mission: to provide the skills and, most importantly, the confidence that allows graduates to academically outperform their peers at four-year universities.

President Gray readily embraces his reputation as a “disruptor.” He believes that traditional higher education is built on an “old model that is destined to fail.” At EC3, they are redefining the business of

JESSICA HUNTER



This month, Jessica Hunter sat down with Erie County Community College President Dr. Chris Gray to learn more about the project’s continued growth, his role, and how leadership is continuing to prioritize affordability, quality, and logical programming to fit Erie’s needs.

education.

One of their key strategies is to prioritize affordability and student-focused learning. For instance, the college’s default policy is not to use expensive textbooks, but rather free open educational resources. They also offer short courses – eight-week sessions that allow adult learners to focus on one subject at a time without juggling a full 16-week schedule.

EC3’s workforce development program is another prime example of their progressive model. They collaborate directly with local businesses to identify their needs, asking them to project their hiring demands for the next five to 10 years. This approach ensures taxpayer dollars are used responsibly and that every program fills a genuine, lasting need in the community.

The college has also been a leader in dual enrollment, with a \$1 million grant opening doors for high school students. The Erie High School valedictorian and salutatorian this year both received their associate’s degrees at EC3 *before* their high school graduation. Dr. Gray is committed to ensuring that even after the grant funding runs out, a low-cost or free option remains for these students, saying, “I don’t believe your finances should dictate whether you get a chance to make your life better.”

Looking to the future, Dr. Gray is excited about

several new initiatives. The college is in the process of securing federal financial aid, which will be a “game changer” for most students. He is, however, concerned about the “working poor” who may not qualify for federal aid but still can’t afford college. In response, EC3 has established a foundation to raise scholarship funds specifically for this group.

Additionally, the college has created an emergency fund for students in crisis. “You and I get a flat tire, it’s a nuisance,” he explains. “One of my students gets a flat tire, their whole life can change.” The fund is designed to provide a boost when it’s needed most.

Ultimately, President Gray’s vision is simple and powerful. When asked to describe EC3’s culture in three words, he doesn’t hesitate: “Students first, always. If it’s not about student success, we don’t care.” It is this unwavering commitment that will continue to fuel EC3’s meteoric rise and transform the lives of countless Erie residents.

To learn more about Erie County Community College or for enrollment info visit: ec3pa.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



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The Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School



Never Too Young to Make a Difference

The Youth Health Knowledge Association and its impact on our community

By: Cassandra Gripp

The Youth Health Knowledge Association (YHKA) is a student-led nonprofit organization that aims to “make healthcare education more accessible to communities by hosting healthcare-themed events, informational sessions, community drives, and more.”

Founded in September of 2023 by Fairview High School student Ananya Desireddi, the YHKA has grown from a small group raising awareness into something greater. As of today, there are over 100 managing members and 400+ volunteers, aiding thousands of people across the United States and internationally, with branches extending into Morocco and Canada.

Desireddi described her inspiration behind creating the organization: “I was motivated by the realization that many health disparities come from a lack of health literacy. I noticed that a lot of people don’t have access to clear, reliable information about preventive care and managing chronic conditions.”

Starting up the organization proved to be a “long and often tedious” process. With the aid of her vice president Ayush Bharath and a dedicated team including Aarnika Purshotham, Florence Manuel, and Asheen Ud giri, their hard work has paid off and the YHKA is able to assist more members

depending on partnerships and the needs of the community. These events range anywhere from healthcare informational sessions to community drives, wellness workshops, and spreading preventative care awareness.

Topics featured at these events and informational sessions can include exploration into the sciences like genetics and chemistry, understanding heart, dental, and mental health. From there, a variety of activities and resources are provided to gauge one’s understanding of the material discussed.

One of the organization’s greatest success stories, Desireddi recounted, “was a health awareness drive that reached over 500 local residents, many of whom had never had access to reliable information about preventive care.”

Another success story worth noting has been the YHKA’s partnership with other local schools to bring interactive health workshops directly to students.

The YHKA hopes to expand into mentorship programs, hands-on health workshops, and incorporate more interactive community initiatives into the future of their organization.

Some of the greatest challenges the YHKA have faced have included volunteer recruitments, maintaining

Founded in September of 2023 by Fairview High School student Ananya Desireddi, the Youth Health Knowledge Association has grown from a small group raising awareness into something greater. As of today, there are over 100 managing members and 400+ volunteers, aiding thousands of people across the United States and internationally, with branches extending into Morocco and Canada.

of our community now than ever.

“From developing our mission and planning our first events to recruiting members and building partnerships, it took a lot of time, effort, and persistence. But seeing the impact we could make kept us motivated throughout,” Desireddi said.

As a standard, the organization usually aims to host one event a month, though some months may have more

constant participation, and coordinating events across multiple locations. However, the team expressed that every obstacle they face grants them alternative ways to organize and build rapport with their community.

Partnerships and general outreach have proven essential for the longevity of the mission, connecting passionate students looking to establish chapters within their own com-

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Initiated locally by a student at Fairview High School, the Youth Health Knowledge Association is an international program that helps to bring health education to the community in accessible ways through educational events that provide information about preventive care and managing chronic conditions.

munities. By guiding these students through the process and replicating her model, Desireddi noted that additional chapters of the YHKA have popped up in Texas and Minnesota, with others underway.

As far as outreach is concerned, the YHKA relies on a mixture of social media promotion and school and community partnerships to ensure these opportunities are reaching as many people in need as possible, as well as through word of mouth. Currently, their Instagram is halfway to 1,000 followers, with new posts made regularly.

One of the most rewarding experiences for Desireddi has been seeing the direct impact of the organization’s events. Whether that be witnessing a student understand the importance of preventative care, or helping a family gain access to the resources they need, “It makes all the effort worthwhile.”

Looking ahead, Desireddi said, “We hope to continue expanding our reach, both locally and internationally, while creating sustainable programs that empower communities with the knowledge to take control of their health.”

For students and other young leaders looking to get involved or start something within their own communities, Desireddi offered sound advice: “Start with a clear mission and don’t be afraid of asking for help. Building a network of supportive peers and community partners is key. Consistency and patience matter more than doing everything perfectly at first.”

Follow @yhkassociation on Instagram to learn about upcoming sessions and events.

Cassandra Gripp is a freelance writer and editor. She can be reached at cassie.gripp@gmail.com.

Hornby Schoolhouse Rings in 150 years

Inspiring a history of education in Erie

By: Chloe Forbes

After 150 years, history is still in session at the Hornby one-room schoolhouse. Step inside and the past lingers: the creak of wooden floors, the haze of chalk dust, and rows of slates on desks, all warmed by the pot-bellied stove that once kept shivering students alert through winter lessons.

Hornby is more than a preserved building – it’s a rare glimpse of local 1875 life and a living chronicle of how education took root in Erie County. The white-painted, cedar-shingled structure in Greenfield Township, with its wooden siding and belfry-topped roofline, is one of the few survivors of a schoolhouse style once common across Pennsylvania.

A narrow hallway still leads visitors into the main classroom, just as it did for generations of children who stashed their coats, boots, and lunch pails there before taking their seats. One of those children, Carol Thompson, walked through Hornby’s doors in 1956, its final year in operation. Today, she returns as a volunteer, her blue-and-white lunch pack still resting in the hall. Made by her mother from a plastic tablecloth, it carries the mark of a tiny intruder: the hole a mouse chewed into her thermos pouch after she forgot it overnight.

Now, the hall is filled with other artifacts from the school’s history, documenting its 81 years in operation.

Pennsylvania’s lesson plan

During the founding of the Quaker Colony in the 1680s, William Penn emphasized that wisdom must be intentionally and carefully curated through the education of youth. His dream was for everyone to have an education, but that privilege was typically reserved for upper-class families who could afford “pay school,” as other children were homeschooled until the 1800s.

In the early 1800s, legislators attempted to ensure education for everyone, passing a law in 1809 that provided a free school system. By then, some schooling in Erie County was already underway.

The first schoolhouse in the pres-

ent-day City of Erie was built in 1806 and located on the southwest corner of Seventh and Holland streets – it’s where the Jones School building, which was built in 1899, still stands. Made of hewn logs, it was about 18 by 20 feet in size, and Erie citizens paid \$30 to have it built privately. Named the Presque Isle Academy, it was surrounded by woods with a path to the village of Erie, located near German Street, below Fourth Street. In 1812, there were 30 girls and 40 boys enrolled, but not much else is known about the school.

This early log schoolhouse was just the beginning. Over the next decades, Pennsylvania’s lawmakers and local residents pushed to make education both free and more widespread.

As Pennsylvania pushed for broader access to education, small towns followed suit.

Building schools and training teachers

In 1834, the Free School Act established a system of education across the commonwealth schools, mandating free public education and prompting the establishment of numerous small, rural schools. Many of them were one-room schoolhouses.

In Washington Township, the first schools were held in the cabins of pioneers until the schoolhouses were erected in 1820, when Edinboro’s population was fewer than 200 people.

In 1849, Pennsylvania passed an act to train teachers across the state, and the Edinboro Normal School was one of 12 state schools opened to teach educators. Florence Lewis followed the pipeline from a one-room schoolhouse to the Edinboro Normal School.

Growing up on the Crawford County and Erie County line, Lewis lived on a farm, and the walk to school in Edinboro was sometimes treacherous in snowy or muddy conditions. Lewis and two other farm girls attending high school in Edinboro actually had to take two rooms with a family closer to Edinboro so that they wouldn’t have to travel too far on a daily basis. They did their own cooking and provided their own firewood, using one room for sleeping and one for cooking and

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The interior of the historic Hornby School is arranged in such a way as to give visitors a glimpse at what life was like in an educational facility 150 years ago. Slate boards, wood burning stoves, and handmade ink pens represent a bygone era.

as a living space. They continued this arrangement until the three of them went on to Normal School.

Normal School training for teachers involved two years of work after graduation to be completely certified. After graduation, Lewis married the brother of her two roommates, the Shrader sisters, and became Florence Shrader.

Shrader’s teaching career included time at Dundon, Waldo, Torry, Gleeten, and Avonia schools.

Although she focused on intermediate grades during her training, she taught first through eighth grades, sometimes with 30 students in a class.

She played “Come Abide with Me” on the piano when the occasion arose, brought soup for children on cold days, felt proud of her accomplishments, and, above all, is quoted saying: [I] was “glad I lived when I did.”

Her story illustrates not only the rigor of teacher training but also the devotion required to serve one-room schools scattered across the county.

Preserved, lost, and repurposed

Beyond Edinboro, the landscape of Erie County was filled with school-

houses – some have been preserved – such as the Sterrettania School in McKean (built 1828), Hatch (1870) and Harding (1923) schools in Corry. Others like the Laird Schoolhouse in Millcreek Township (demolished on Earth Day this year) have been lost, despite the protests of residents such as Mary Ellen Magoc, who gave eloquent appeals to ultimately unreceptive township supervisors. Still others have been adapted to new uses. The Valley School in Albion has become a living history museum much like Hornby, showcasing history to residents and children; meanwhile, The Schoolhouse in Fairview now hosts weddings and serves up craft cocktails.

Homework in historic preservation

Many one-room schoolhouses were shuttered in the 1950s as consolidation efforts aimed to create larger and more modern schools, which were seen as a way to improve educational standards and facilities for rural students in the post-World War II era.

For Hornby School, the reorganization of districts marked the beginning of the Wattsburg School District and

the end of the one-room schoolhouse. Instead of building a joint school district, a central school welcomed students from 10 area schoolhouses.

After closing in 1956, the building sat vacant under the care of Josephine Walter, next-door neighbor and one of the last educators at the school. In 1973, for the 100th anniversary of the school's groundbreaking, Walter donated the building and a half-acre for restoration and the creation of an educational museum. She later donated another half acre.

Since then, Hornby School Restoration Society has utilized grant funding and donations to replace the foundation, repair the roof, fill the interior with historic relics, and open its doors to the public. The school has been restored to its 1875 state, complete with the water pump and outhouse on the outskirts of the property.

It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2008 and continues to offer tours, host school groups, and hold workshops on basket making and writing in Spencerian script. The school also retains all its records, which offer a base for genealogy and local history research that cannot be found online.

Marge Clark, president of the Hornby School Restoration Society, explained that being on the historic register inspires the group to seek out repair work using period appropriate materials, and have work completed as it would've been in 1875.

Still in session

Currently, Hornby hosts school groups and is open to the public on Sundays in the summer. The society and the volunteers who maintain the school are mostly former educators or individuals whose family members attended the school.

"A bunch of us old teachers take care of this," Clark said. "Nobody gets paid a cent."

To the volunteers, there's nothing quite like the time capsule that the schoolhouse provides. The joy of seeing children hear the school bell ring, playing games in the schoolyard, and writing on old slates is unmatched.

"We were playing 'Button Button, Who's Got the Button?' and oh my gosh, they had not a clue, and it wasn't even a button we used, it was just a rock," recalled volunteer and "gamemaster" Jean Striney. "The whole thing of trying to maintain a poker face, we had a blast. They got very rowdy."

It's those memories that she said make the work so rewarding. Similarly, volunteers take great pleasure in connecting people with their past as the yearbooks lining the bookshelves offer a glimpse into the lives of loved ones centuries ago, along with donated desks and artifacts from the school.

As the need for new volunteers grows, Hornby searches for creative routes like engaging college students majoring in education and activating

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Take a step back in time with a visit to the historic Hornby School in Greenfield Township. The 150-year-old structure will be celebrating its anniversary with an event on Sept. 20 at the schoolhouse located at 10000 Station Road.

an interest in locals.

"My biggest need now is volunteers to help maintain what we have," Clark remarked.

After a day of writing on a slate, ringing the bell, and learning script, the society is hopeful that people will want to become more deeply involved in an important living piece of history that other areas of the county have lost sight of.

To celebrate the 150 years Hornby has survived and thrived, the society will host a celebration from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. on Sept. 21 at the school, 10000 Station Road. It will include live music, artifacts, tours, games for

children, and special activities – learn about what a Victorian-era lunch looked like, what an 1880s-style spelling bee consisted of, and test your knowledge at fifth-grade math.

There will also be a multitude of fundraising opportunities, including one that gives people a chance to commemorate the educators who have made an impact in their lives.

Can't make the celebration? Visit the museum Sundays, 1 to 5 p.m., April through October. For details, visit hornbyschool.org.

Chloe Forbes is a local journalist. Reach her at chloeforbes14@gmail.com

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Canada Lee's Knockout Path from Erie to Broadway

From welterweight warrior to theater legend

By: Jonathan Burdick

In 1941, Leonard Lionel Cornelius Canegata, known professionally as Canada Lee, debuted as the lead in Orson Welles's Broadway adaptation of Richard Wright's *Native Son*. There was significant fanfare surrounding the show and Lee's performance was described as "thrilling" with "authenticity" and "power." Some even compared him to Spencer Tracy.

His path to Broadway likely surprised even him. While growing up in New York City, he initially studied music and performed as a concert violinist. But in 1921, at age 14, he abruptly quit. He left home and worked for two years in Saratoga Springs as a jockey. There are a few origin stories to how he ended up in boxing rings. In one version, it began in these stables when an adult ex-boxer made a racist comment. The 110-pound teenage Lee allegedly knocked the 150-pound grown man to the ground with such force that another former-boxer stableman decided to take him under his wing and show him the ropes. Whether true or embellished, after returning to Harlem, Lee soon entered the amateur boxing circuits, winning around 90 of his first 100 fights.

This was a time when spectator sports were surging in popularity across the United States. Boxing was second only to baseball with world heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey being as much a household name as Babe Ruth. The entry barrier to learning boxing was less significant than other sports and neighborhoods often had their own boxing clubs. A neighborhood fighter winning a match was a deep source of community pride.

In Pennsylvania, Erie was very much a boxing city. Local fighters such as Max C. Strub and Xenophon "Kid Xeny" Kakouros helped popularize the sport. There were initially two state-approved boxing clubs in operation: Tommy Maxwell's Majestic Athletic Club and Freddy Dailey's Erie Athletic Club. In September 1927, a third was established called the Auditorium Athletic Club, or Audi A.C., formed by duo Jim Carney and Nick Pistory. As there were limited venues in which to fight, the three clubs rotated Fridays at what became known as Carney Auditorium at 11th and French streets.

Carney was an effective promoter, recruiting fighters from all over. Following their club's first Friday program, Erie Daily Times sports reporter Joe Martin described the event as a "high class attraction" that "spared no expense." He predicted enthusiastic support from Erieites who eagerly watched – and, of course, placed their bets.

One of the club's first majorly hyped fights was in November 1927 between Erie's Walter "Heavy" Andrews and Pittsburgh's Jack Zivic. Heavy had the superior right jab, Martin asserted, but Zivic's left hook could give him the edge. All 2,000 seats were filled as the two battled fiercely the entire 10 rounds, both absorbing blows that had taken previous op-

ponents to the floor. The judges awarded Zivic the win, much to the crowd's displeasure.

This was the boxing scene in Erie when Canada Lee arrived in 1928. He was recruited by Carney alongside a cohort of other Harlem fighters. Lee lodged at the recently opened Pope Hotel on French Street, a safe location for Black out-of-towners. He was soon hitting the gym with Bill Purdy, trainer for many of Erie's boxing greats. Lee was described as "graceful" and "gentlemanly" with a "warm, inviting" presence.

Lee was now fighting professionally. He was barely over 20 years old, but was already making a name for himself as a "sensational welterweight" who hit hard with his "dynamic left hand" and a "pile driving right." Some already considered him "one of the greatest fighters in the game" with "a string of wins a mile long."

Locals were excited for Lee's first local fight. "Canada Lee [is] the classiest piece of fighting machinery this man's town has gazed upon for many a moon," penned Martin in the lead-up. His opponent was Pittsburgh's Young Saylor, "a real scrapper" who was "one of the niftiest boxers in the game." He'd recently given Syracuse's formidable Bucky Lawless "a boxing lesson" at a Conneaut Lake fight, who Lee had also recently taken down with a second round one-two to the chest and stomach.

For the first six rounds, Lee was "coasting to victory" – but when he went for an uppercut to the stomach, it landed below the belt. "The blow was recognized as accidental by the crowd," wrote Martin. A foul was still called. Across the sport, professional referees were cleaning up matches where dirty blows and even *eye-gouging* were once common. This gave Saylor the win. The Erie crowd booed, but Lee "showed so much class" and "there was no hard feeling."

Carney recognized Erie's enthusiasm for the "whizbang" Lee. He offered him another fight two weeks later. Lee accepted. His opponent was Larry Brignolia and the Erie Daily Times predicted the fight would be "one of the greatest ring battles ever seen in Erie." Brignolia was described as a "wielder of wicked gloves," but Lee had a proven record of being able to *take* hits in the ring, while Brignolia was warned to "stay out of range of Lee's gloves."

The match lived up to the hype. "It was one of those jamborees you might hear about now and then, but you seldom see," wrote Martin. For the first seven rounds, the two "fought on even terms like a pair of bulldogs." Both gave *and* received a pummeling – jabs and crosses to the face, round-houses to the head, and "dull thuds to the stomach and body."

"I thought every now and then that one or the other must go down under the barrage of punches," continued Martin. "But neither gave an inch, nor asked

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Canada Lee took a circuitous path to stardom – boxing professionally for years, which brought him to our region, before going on to become a Broadway star. He is pictured here in his role as the lead in Orson Welles's Broadway adaptation of Richard Wright's *Native Son* in 1941.

for any quarter." As predicted though, Lee had the stamina going into round eight. Brignolia slowed and Lee took advantage, pulling ahead point by point over the final three rounds.

The crowd *loved* it. "[N]o crowd in the world is half so good as a boxing crowd," the Erie Daily Times proclaimed. "They're real fellows. The best in the world. Jim Carney included."

Carney immediately booked Lee again, this time a rematch with Bucky Lawless. Lawless was hesitant, but Carney made an offer he couldn't refuse. "Bucky figures that Erie is his lucky town and he expects to go in there on Friday night and box the spots off of Lee," his manager said.

In the first round, Lee tripped and fell over. As soon as he stood up, Lawless unleashed "a mile a minute" flurry, connecting a left hook that knocked Lee to the ground for a five count. Lee shook it off and the two went toe-to-toe into the third round before Lee landed a hit that took Lawless to the ground, but was called a foul. The referee gave Lawless the match. This time Lee's corner protested, as did the crowd, but the decision was final.

In August 1930, after a year of fighting back in New York City, Lee was set to return to Erie for a main event at the Carney Auditorium. His opponent was Tommy Freeman, one of the best welterweights in the nation who'd trained in Erie over the past year. The winner of this match would challenge Jack Thompson for the welterweight world title. Predictions varied, but leaned in Lee's favor.



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September 11, 2025

What many *didn't* know was that earlier in the year during a fight at Madison Square Garden, Lee took a hook to the head that detached his right eye's retina. He was now partially blinded in the eye, a secret he guarded closely.

In front of a full capacity crowd, Freeman had the edge for the first two rounds. In the third, Lee delivered a hook to Freeman's chin that sent his mouthguard flying. The crowd roared. Freeman responded with continuous left jabs, which Lee almost certainly had trouble tracking, followed by quick body shots. They went the distance with no knockout, but Freeman won the decision even if "he knew he had been to the races." A month later, Freeman defeated Thompson to become world champion.

Despite the loss and injury, Lee was still fighting well. A few weeks later in Erie, he knocked out Freddy Fitzgerald in the tenth. But as months passed, his vision worsened and he lost numerous fights in a row, mostly in decisions. In 1931, he went out west to cities like Omaha and Sioux City, where he experienced a rollercoaster of wins and losses.

In 1933, he returned again to Erie, as usual, residing in the Pope Hotel. Training with him were Jacques "Jack" Dessimoz and Cyril Graham, an amateur featherweight using the moniker *Young Canada Lee*. They hit the gym and local reporters noted they trained in "the old, slangbang style that toughens you up and gets you ready for the heavy grind."

"I always liked Erie," said Lee. "Erie fans always gave me a fine deal and I always tried to give them their money's worth. I hope I get more chances around here to prove that I'm still able to go with the best of them." On March 3, in Lee's first fight back in Erie, the "old ring veteran" won with a knockout in the third, leaving his opponent's face "in pretty bad shape."

A few weeks later though, it was reported that Erie's Chief of Police, William F. Detzel, gave instructions to the trio and their manager, Robert Dessimoz, to leave Erie by the end of the week. The

reasons reported were vague and amounted to "all was not well" since they came to Erie. There were no charges, but it appeared that numerous boxers locally were caught up in an investigation by the State Athletic Commission that involved Robert Dessimoz.

"We've been ordered out of town, but we're not going," Lee said, confirming he'd retained legal counsel. "We've not been given any reason for the ousting and we don't know what it's all about."

Some, including Graham and local legend Max C. Strub, were quickly cleared, but any findings related to Lee and Dessimoz remain unclear. As for Lee though, he departed Erie for a fight in Toronto. Now with "a permanent blackout" in his right eye, the loss was his last fight. After nearly 100 professional matches, Canada Lee hung up his gloves.

He was broke though and, still young, he needed a new career. He dabbled as a bandleader, traveling from club to club, before in 1934, stumbling upon something new: the stage.

Lee's first show was *Stevedore* at the Civic Repertoire Theatre in Manhattan followed by *Sailor Beware*. In 1936, he was cast by Orson Welles as Banquo in an extremely successful production of *Macbeth*, a role which Lee credited as changing his life. The Erie Daily Times covered Lee's newfound successes with pride and affection.

When he took on the lead role in Welles' *Native Son* in 1941, he was experiencing fame well beyond that from his boxing days. The New York Times outright called him one of the best actors in the *country*. "I'm completely bewildered," Lee said. "I don't know what to do about all of this. I don't know what to say to people or how to act in public."

He still mentioned how much he missed boxing though. The "polite applause of the theater audience," he said, would never compare to the thrill of "the roar of the [Madison Square Garden] crowd when the referee counts to ten over a tough opponent."

"That's a funny thing," reflected Lee after acting at the Garden. "This time I came through [these doors] as an actor. The last time I came through there, I was a professional fighter." The reporter joked that they should write a play about *that*.

In the early 1940s, he performed in two comedies by playwright William Saroyan followed by a starring role in *South Pacific* as directed by Lee Strasberg, the father of method acting. In 1944, he was cast in Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*. He bounced between theater, film, and radio work, turning down any roles that he found stereotypical.

Due to his increasing civil rights activism and connection to other progressive causes though, he soon found himself the target of anti-communist hysteria and with the FBI's investigation of him, he was blacklisted. When told his blacklisting would be dropped if he publicly named Paul Robeson, a fellow actor and friend, as a communist, Lee refused. During a 1949 radio interview in which he was blindsided with accusations and relentless interruptions, the hosts proclaimed it didn't matter if he was *actually* a communist. If people *thought* he was a communist, then he was a communist.



Lee's role as the lead in Broadway's 1941 *Native Son* brought him fame far beyond that which he earned as a welterweight boxing star.

In a public speech covered by the New York Times, Lee denied such claims and scathingly referred to the "lynch mentality" of American radio shows which portrayed Black Americans as "cannibals, dehumanized monsters, clowns, menials, thieves, and liars" while their own voices were "jailed in a concentration camp of silence" and "surrounded by indifference."

When he attempted work on films overseas, his passport was denied, resulting in missed opportunities on film productions of *Othello* and *Native Son*. In 1950, Lee and Sidney Poitier were smuggled into South Africa where they successfully filmed *Cry, the Beloved Country*. It was Lee's final film.

On May 9, 1952, only a year after marrying Frances Pollack, he died in New York City at age 45. While initially reported as a heart attack, his widow later confirmed that it had been kidney failure and that he had slipped into a coma days before his death. Numerous eulogies proclaimed Lee one of the greatest stage actors of his era. The Erie Daily Time referred to his final film performance as "brilliant." Then, of course, there was the legacy of his boxing years. Max C. Strub, who today is one of the few boxers in the Erie Sports Hall of Fame, called Lee the best fighter he ever saw.

"His life was picturesque, yet full of frustrations and great sorrows," his widow wrote decades later, adding, "Admirably, Canada never lost his will to overcome adversity."

Canada Lee was a giant among men," the Canada Lee Heritage Foundation says on its website today. "He combined the courage and heart of a lion with gentleness, compassion, integrity, and above all love for his fellow man."

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



Canada Lee played the role of Banquo in an extremely successful production of *Macbeth* in 1936, which Lee credited as changing his life.

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The Audacity of Hope – Then, and Now

Barack Obama comes to Erie on Sept. 16th for a conversation at the Erie Insurance Arena

By: Ben Speggen

President Barack Obama will kick off the Jefferson Educational Society's 2025 Global Summit. As a part of the team that's been working to bring the 44th President of the United States to Erie, here is what I've been thinking about – and getting asked – in advance of President Obama's appearance at the Erie Insurance Arena.

When looking to the past, there is a temptation to give into a spiraling mind-wander of “remember whens.” Perhaps it's because looking back on good memories gives us hope in the present that the future, too, will be good to us. Maybe it's because revisiting the trials we endured then gives us hope and strength to face the challenges in front of us now. Or, it could be because storytelling is something that makes us human, as we hope to make sense of what's come before, how it's gotten us here, and where we might be headed.

Whatever the case, in 2008, for me, personally, I remember when I was in the middle of working on a graduate degree. I was studying, teaching, and working while wondering what might come next. Much of the wondering came from earlier events setting the course of motion.

In 2007, the Great Recession began. Before that, it was the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, which I remember watching as a high school junior, that led first, to a patriotic unifying of the United States of America as we rallied around our fallen brethren with the attacks in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and then into two prolonged, divisive wars in the Middle East that were still raging on. And, of course, with much happening in between.

Amid unsettling uncertainty hanging heavily in 2008 – ranging from the personal, what I might be able to do with myself upon graduating; to the profound, where is the world headed – I remember that I had hope. And that was in large part thanks to “The Hope Guy.”

In 2008, following the presidential campaign launched by a junior Democratic senator from Illinois, Los Angeles-based street artist and graphic designer Shepard Fairey created a stenciled portrait of then-Presidential Candidate Barack Obama. Colored in blues and reds and whites, with the word “hope” in all capital letters below Obama's upward, outward-looking gaze. The image also featured the campaign logo – an ‘O’ with a river of red and white sweeping right to left, topped with a blue arc closing the circle – designed by Sol Sender. Based on the photography by Mannie Garcia for the Associated Press, Fairey's “Barack Obama ‘Hope’ Poster” was his second iteration. The first read: Progress.

The “Hope” poster, at first, was just that – a street-art-styled poster. But it would soon begin spreading far and wide from the street-lev-

el. The campaign sold some-50,000 posters, a San Francisco-based streetwear company began producing T-shirts, stickers were stuck on everything from utility poles to reusable mugs, and a free downloadable version of the image led to myriad more usages. Peter Schjeldahl, art critic for the New Yorker, called it “the most efficacious American political illustration since Uncle Sam Wants You,” which might've sounded hyperbolic at the time but did capture the pervasive, infectious nature of hope in the spirit of a grassroots campaign gaining momentum.

That momentum helped deliver a victory for then-Senator Barack Obama on the night of Nov. 4, 2008. The Obama campaign won both the popular vote – securing a then-record popular voter turnout – as well as 365 Electoral College votes, defeating Sen. John McCain atop the GOP ticket.

As McCain said in his concession speech that night in Arizona, the state he'd go on to continue serving in the Senate, making history more than a few more times, “the American people have spoken, and they have spoken clearly.” As the crowd began to react, offering some light boos, he raised his right hand to hush the crowd. When McCain told those gathered before him that he'd called Obama to congratulate him, the boos grew louder. McCain raised both arms, saying, “please,” to which the crowd quieted, as he continued, “to congratulate him on being elected the next president of the country that we both love. In a contest as long and difficult as this campaign has been, his success alone commands my respect for his ability and perseverance, but that he managed to do so by inspiring the hopes of so many millions of Americans who'd once wrongly believed that they had little at stake or little influence in the election of an American president is something I deeply admire and commend him for.”

McCain went on to acknowledge this historic moment in time in a nation that once enslaved people of color and denied them the rights afforded only to select individuals. Referencing “the outrage” President Theodore Roosevelt's invitation to Booker T. Washington to join him at the White House received just a hundred years earlier, he said, “America today is a world away from the cruel and prideful bigotry of that time, and there is no better evidence of this than the election of an African-American to the presidency of the United States.” That statement was met with whistles, applause, and cheers from the crowd.

McCain continued his speech, pledging his support and urging all his backers to do the same. To call the character revealed in that speech “decent” – which ran consistent with the late-Senator's earlier actions of defending Obama on the campaign trail, to his 2017 vote to uphold the Affordable Care

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Los Angeles-based street artist and graphic designer Shepard Fairey created the now-iconic stenciled portrait of then-Presidential Candidate Barack Obama that helped inspire hope in many Americans. This month, the Jefferson Educational Society is bringing Barack Obama to Erie for the inaugural event of their 2025 Global Summit.

Act – falls short of what it deserves. But that sense of decency – that one may not only accept defeat but meet it in the moment with resolve to rallying supporters not in opposition but to continue to work toward a shared greater good made more common to more people – had given, at the time, even more hope in collective progress.

What followed – from the largest crowd at a presidential inauguration in D.C., to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, to appointing the first Hispanic American to the Supreme Court, to bringing the war in Iraq to an end and Operation Neptune Spear that led to the killing of the man responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks, to winning a second consecutive four-year term as U.S. president, becoming the first U.S. president to publicly support same-sex marriage, to efforts to reduce U.S. military presence in the Middle East and normalizing relations with Cuba, to... all the rest. Which, as they say, is history.

So, what of hope today? Does “The Hope Guy” still have it?

In Erie on Tuesday, Sept. 16, nearly 8,000 people in



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attendance, and more streaming online, will have the opportunity to hear from the 44th President of the United States of America themselves. The Jefferson Educational Society will host “A Conversation with President Barack Obama” at the Erie Insurance Arena to kick off its 2025 Global Summit speaker series.

In the spirit of full transparency, in my role at the JES, a nonpartisan think tank headquartered in Erie promoting civic engagement and education, I am part of the small team – members of which I owe countless thanks for their efforts – that has been working over the past few months to make this possibility a reality. And, in reality, invitations and work like this are often years in the making.

In 2021, I was part of the JES team that welcomed the 43rd President of the United States George W. Bush to Erie, which, too, was years in the making (as one might imagine: even in post-office years, U.S. presidents’ schedules aren’t exactly wide open). Proving you can host a president once doesn’t hurt in suggesting – and inspiring – that you can do it again, of course.

And, as might be suspected, because I help organize a lot of the JES’s programming – not just the Global Summit but the some-120-plus year-round events – I get a lot of suggestions for speakers to bring in. At the top of the list: Obama.

So, when we learned our invitation yielded a “yes,” as might be suspected, I had a bit of a “2010 then-Vice President Joe Biden on a hot mic upon the news of the signing of the Affordable Care Act” reaction in thinking our news was a BFD.

Part of that thinking it’s a big deal is a pride for our JES team. I write these words in advance of the event, knowing that much is yet to be done in the lead-up, but knowing that we’ve been trusted with the honor and privilege to host a president means more than words can really relay – especially given that these kinds of things don’t happen often. I know I’m doubly fortunate, because I had that same reaction and feeling in 2020 when President Bush said yes.

Another part of that thinking is that this is a big deal for Erie. A “bellwether county in a swing state,” Erie receives the majority of its national political attention in the lead-up to and during presidential election years. “So goes Erie, so goes the nation” so goes the saying, which has held true in the modern presidential era.

But rather than a rally in which a candidate is asking for your vote, or a surrogate is asking you to support someone they’re backing, during which national reporters parachute in to record the speeches, talk with those in the crowd, and maybe even visit a dinor or two to get the “Real Americans’ take” on issues ranging from the seemingly simple (what do you like about Candidate X?) to the profoundly complex (what’s your take on international diplomacy and trade?) that result in shrunken soundbites making the nightly news and fit to print the following day – Sept. 16 offers something else.

It provides a chance to hear from someone who’s sat in the most powerful position in the world, now

years removed from it. It offers the opportunity to hear from someone with a seemingly improbable path to the Oval Office – the son of a mother from Kansas and a father from Kenya, born in Hawaii and raised with the help of Midwest grandparents.

Someone who worked his way through college on scholarships and student loans, who, when given the time and chance, turned toward community service. A person who, after becoming the first African-American president of the Harvard Law Review, returned to Chicago to teach constitutional law. Who then began a career in public service, first winning a seat in the Illinois State Senate and then the U.S. Senate. And then, the rest, as said before, is history, but someone today who’s still inspiring, encouraging, and empowering changemakers with the Obama Foundation and his post-presidential work.

Erie on Tuesday, Sept. 16, with nearly 8,000 people in attendance, and more streaming online, will have the opportunity to hear from the 44th President of the United States of America themselves. The Jefferson Educational Society will host “A Conversation with President Barack Obama” at the Erie Insurance Arena to kick off its 2025 Global Summit speaker series.

It provides a chance not to stand cheering and booing in reaction to what we already think and believe. It offers the opportunity to sit shoulder to shoulder and gather screen to screen to listen and learn, to hear and reflect upon the insights and experiences of a man who once led the nation and the world from 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

Just as I receive both solicited and unsolicited input on who the JES should invite to Erie, recently, I’ve been getting asked often, “So what’s he going to talk about?”

One look around today’s media landscape proves there’s no shortage of topics. What I have recommended to those asking that question is to check out the *IMO* podcast with First Lady Michelle Obama and her brother Craig Robinson. There’s a lot to be gleaned from their conversation, which focuses on “What’s Right About Young Men,” and includes the far-less serious debate on ketchup’s age-appropriate restriction as a condiment – a topic of discussion, among many others, between Obama and the late Anthony Bourdain had in 2016 while dining in

Hanoi, Vietnam, for Bourdain’s *Parts Unknown* television series, at a restaurant that has since encased their table and chairs to commemorate the visit.

Another is a recent conversation at the Connecticut Forum with historian, bestselling author, and author of the *Letters from an American Substack* Heather Cox Richardson, who the JES hosted in conversation at last year’s Global Summit with *The Atlantic*’s Tom Nichols. In it, Obama and Richardson cover a lot of the ground, from the past and present in the hour-long exchange. They explore his initial desire to be a basketball player or an architect, his work in community service and what led him to it, his campaign’s humble beginnings and how trusting young people played a crucial role, and his favorite of speeches he’s delivered.

The latter, it turns out is the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery marches, in which he reflects on a young John Lewis standing shoulder to shoulder with those seeking to narrow the margins of those included in America’s story pitted against those on horseback, wielding clubs and other weapons seeking to keep, if not make, it narrower. That location and day and their place in the nation’s history, Obama relayed, belong alongside those like Concord, Lexington, and Appomattox. A common thread of all locations: the competing sides of the American story – one in which we agree upon our founding principles that have expanded to include more over time, and the other, which seeks to exclude and reduce being American to include a selected few.

What stood out to me was that – and a note about the future.

“I’m optimistic,” Obama told Richardson in response to her asking what advice he’d share with the audience that he gives to young folks he and Michelle work with through their foundation. “I’m still the Hope Guy – I am,” he continued to a round of audience applause.

Talking about the various initiatives of the foundation, Obama told Richardson, “You watch these young people, and it will make you optimistic. Because the thing I’ve seen is that the better story of America is alive and well, and it’s in the hearts and minds of people everywhere... if we’re willing to attach ourselves to that better story... then I think the good will win out.”

As it turns out, the guy on the Hope poster is still the Hope Guy, and he has hope in the idea of America, which is, after all, what makes us American whether we believe in conservative or liberal principles.

I, too, have hope in that idea, and I hope to see you on Sept. 16 in Erie or on screens to hear and learn from the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama.

Tuesday, Sept. 16 // 6:30 p.m. // Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. // For info or virtual tickets, visit: jeserie.org

You can follow Ben Speggen, vice president of the JES, and a contributing editor at the Erie Reader, on Threads @BenSpeggen, and connect with him on LinkedIn.

POTUS Presents Timely Female-led Hilarity at PACA

Behind Every Great Dumbass Are Seven Women Trying to Keep Him Alive

Beginning Thursday, Sept. 11

In a political climate where every headline feels like satire and every press conference teeters on the edge of absurdity, one four-letter word is all it takes to push the White House over the brink. In *POTUS: Or, Behind Every Great Dumbass Are Seven Women Trying to Keep Him Alive*, the president's latest verbal fumble sparks a PR nightmare with global implications, leaving seven brilliant, exasperated women scrambling to clean up the mess, preserve democracy, and keep their sanity.

Originally exploding onto Broadway in 2022 at the Shubert Theatre under the direction of Susan Stroman, *POTUS* made waves as a whip-smart, all-female tour de force. Now, the chaos comes to Erie, as PACA presents this witty comedy with a dynamic, all-female cast and crew. Directed by Kate Neubert-Lechner and assisted by Erica Stripp, the production isn't just about showcasing women onstage, it's about creating an intentional space powered entirely by female energy, from the ground up. "Given the message of the piece, it felt necessary to have

it developed with only female energy in the room," said Neubert-Lechner. "Out of that, we've had a process that has felt very organic, thoughtful, supportive, and caring. These women have each other's backs, in the rehearsal room, in performance, and offstage."

Audiences will recognize some familiar PACA favorites, including Nora Schillinger, Kat McMahon, and Nicole Schneelock. They're joined by newcomers Natalie Waddell Rutter, Robin Baranski, and Renee Tellers. And in a long-awaited comeback, Chatiqua Keyes Carr returns for the first time since 2018, bringing her magnetic presence back to the stage after stepping away to focus on raising her two daughters.

The play is a sprint through one day in the White House, where the president (unseen but definitely felt) accidentally launches a PR snafu that teeters on the edge of a full-blown international incident. The seven women who keep the administration functioning must put out fires, navigate exploding egos, dodge scandal, and keep their sanity intact, all while decked in heels fighting the patriarchy. While it doesn't set out to de-

DIGG IT DAVE SCHROEDER



The folks at PACA are bringing a timely comedic drama to the stage this month with *POTUS: Or, Behind Every Great Dumbass Are Seven Women Trying to Keep Him Alive*. The all-female cast, led by all-female directorship, will help audiences find similarities to current, past, and possibly even future administrations.

pict any particular president and their administration, audiences will certainly be able to draw some similarities to current, past, and possibly even future administrations.

Fair warning: the language is just as bold as the women speaking it. It's used in a comedic way but, definitely something to be prepared for. Above all, *POTUS* is a show for ev-

ery woman who's ever rolled her eyes from the sidelines while holding everything together behind the scenes.
– Amy VanScoter

Thursdays through Saturdays, Sept. 11 through Sept. 20 at 7:30 p.m. // Sundays, Sept. 14 and 21 at 2 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$20 // For tickets and info: tickets.erie reader.com

A "Lovely" Lady

My Fair Lady takes the mainstage at the Erie Playhouse

BEGINNING FRIDAY, SEPT. 12

In a classic rags-to-riches tale, *My Fair Lady* makes its way to the Erie Playhouse Mainstage for three weekends of unforgettable performances of such songs as "On the Street

Where You Live" and "Wouldn't It Be Lovely."

Following the story of Eliza Doolittle (Ellise Chase), a cockney flower girl whose dialect is of the greatest aggravation to phonetician professor Henry Higgins (Rich Tryzbiak), one



Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins hit the Erie Playhouse's LECOM stage in *My Fair Lady*, and everything from the cast to the costumes and the songs are set to inspire and impress their audiences.

can witness her comedic transformation into higher society and ladyship.

Director Ryan Ingram is excited to return to the director's chair for the sixth time in his history with the Erie Playhouse. With a lasting love of George Bernard Shaw, author of *Pygmalion*, the source material for the beloved musical, Ingram noted, "The directness of his characters' banter, while often comedic, also exposes their true opinions, motives and biases, often educating his audiences on social issues."

In addition to directing the show, Ingram works as a costume designer for the Erie Playhouse. Through clothes ranging from the looks of "dirty street vendors" to the "lush and fabulously outlandish elites," he stressed the importance of how costumes can aid in storytelling.

Ingram's favorite part of the production is the song "Get Me To The

Church On Time," where he commended choreographer Melissa J. Dixon's "ability to bring out the best in the performers in a truly magical way."

The show will feature several notable faces from the Playhouse's fine selection of past productions, and six actors and actresses making their Mainstage debut: Kristin Lynn, Zach Hyman, Lydia Johnson, Mia Koket, Paul Gress, and Chris Van Riper.

"In this production, I am really struck by how well our multi-generational cast is working together to tell the same story," Ingram said. "It has been inspiring to watch them interact."
– Cassandra Gripp

Fridays and Saturdays, Sept. 12 through Sept. 28 at 7:30 p.m. // Thursday, Sept. 25 at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays, Sept. 21 and Sept. 28 at 2 p.m. // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. // \$19-30 // For tickets and info: erieplayhouse.org

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There's a Party Going on in Perry Square

Annual event kicks off Hispanic Heritage Month

SATURDAY, SEPT. 13

The annual Fiesta on the Square Hispanic Heritage celebration will take place in Perry Square. Kicking off Hispanic Heritage Month, which is Sept. 15 through Oct. 15, the event will celebrate and recognize the vast array of cultures, traditions, and experiences within the Hispanic and Latino communities.

Eddie Ocasio, co-founder and vice president of the Erie Latino Leadership Association and also a member of the Mayor's Hispanic Latine Advisory Council, said both groups collaborate to host the free, family-friendly event from noon to 7 p.m.

"We will have many food vendors selling different authentic ethnic

foods, including those from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Colombia, and more," said Ocasio. In addition to grabbing a delicious bite, vendors selling merchandise and resource tables from businesses and local organizations will be part of the day. The fest will also include live music to spotlight different dance styles such as cumbia, salsa, and merengue. A DJ will be on hand to play Spanish hits and there will be many activities for families as well.

Additional resources about Hispanic Heritage Month can be found at hispanicheritagemonth.gov, a site hosted by the Library of Congress featuring virtual exhibits, bilingual resources, stories of Latino achievements, and more. But for the real-deal taste of the authentic food (nothing

CONTRIBUTED BY EDDIE OCASIO



The Erie Latino Leadership Association is proud to present their annual Fiesta in the Square – a celebration of Hispanic heritage and culture that will turn Perry Square into a colorful and delicious musical fiesta that is welcoming to all.

virtual about that!), music, and community, don't miss the local event. – Gretchen Gallagher Durney

Noon to 7 p.m. // Perry Square, 601 State St. // Free // For more info: facebook.com/ErieLatinoLeadershipAssociation

Reading is Resistance

Lake Erie Lit Fest Returns to Frontier Park

SATURDAY, SEPT. 13

Books are powerful. They have the power to transport, to inform, to inspire, to enlighten, to escape, and to educate. The organizers behind the annual Lake Erie Lit Fest understand this importance and feel that their event and the attention it brings to the literary arts is more important now than ever.

For one day, the Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park (LEAF) will be taken over by the written word. On the main stage (which is the amphitheater space at LEAF), attendees can expect live performances, poetry, storytelling, and readings. Budding bookworms will delight in the children's tent which will feature storytimes and activities designed to spark a love of reading. The marketplace will feature literary vendors of all kinds: bookbinders, local authors, local booksellers, nonprofits, and more. Additionally, there are multiple workshops scheduled throughout the event which puts fans and practicing writers in conversation with published authors. Subjects of these workshops range from "Building Unique Characters" to "How to Start Journaling."

To combat recent governmental

ERIN PHILLIPS



The Lake Erie Lit Festival celebrates its second year in Frontier Park with a packed slate of literary events and workshops, local author signings, giveaways, and more – as organizers honor the written word in all of its forms.

acts of censorship in the form of book bans, this year's event will feature a special banned book giveaway. Brad Ford, owner of Erie Art Company and organizer of the festival, comments, "Books are mirrors and windows. For marginalized children, they validate identities; for all children, they offer glimpses into other lives, fostering empathy." Attendees will be able to choose one free banned book to take home with them including titles such

as *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, and *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson, among others. "In the face of division and fear, reading a book and a librarian shelving it are powerful declarations of commitment to an inclusive, enlightened future," Ford expresses. – Erin Phillips

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



SACRED PATHWAYS

art exhibit

Explore our September Theme, *Inner Landscapes*, with the work of local artist, Ruth Swaney.

Art Open Weekdays
10:00 A.M. until 3:00 P.M.

An Art Gallery Reception will be held on *Sunday, September 21 at 7:00 P.M.*

With our featured artist available, and artwork available for purchase.

Followed by a candlelight service, *Evening Echoes*, at 8:00 P.M.

At the Cathedral of St. Paul
134 W 7th St. Erie, Pa 16501
cathedralofstpaul.org



***Tethered's* Immersive Theatrical Experience Arrives Downtown**

Explore memory and consciousness like never before

BEGINNING FRIDAY, SEPT. 19

This September, *Tethered* – Erie's own original, immersive theatrical company – transforms the historic, 130,000-square-foot Erie Maennerchor building into a living maze of memory and meaning. Across four nights, audiences will have the opportunity to explore three full floors as dancers, actors, and musicians bring to life a near-future story about a woman with Alzheimer's, her son, and the experimental technology that allows them to step inside her past.

If you're new to the form, you're not the only one – thankfully, producer John C. Lyons has a way to put it simply.

"Immersive theater surrounds the audience, blurring the lines between performer and spectator," says Lyons. Through conversation about the unique show, it becomes clear that *Tethered* offers an opportunity to engage with characters and environments rather than simply sitting and observing them. After last year's sold-out debut,

this year's production scales up – more rooms, more pathways, and an emphasis on movement through the entire building.

"It feels more like a lived-in, fully-connected space," continues Lyons.

September's *Memory & Consciousness* production blends dance, theater, music, film, and projection, inviting attendees to follow any of 20 characters as their routes intersect and diverge. The show runs in a one-hour loop, three times each evening with subtle variations. Lyons' inspiration came from experiencing *Sleep No More* in New York.

"It felt like walking into a movie, and I didn't want to leave," says Lyons. That sense of wonder and uninhibited discovery is the driving force behind *Tethered*. "There's no right way to view the show," Lyons adds.

Tickets (general admission, talkback afterparty, and VIP options), as well as additional information, are available now at tickets.eriereader.com. Free private parking is located behind the

CONTRIBUTED



Erie's original immersive theatrical experience *Tethered* takes over the historic Maennerchor club for two weekends as they offer the community a new take on how to experience a performance – where attendees interact with the actors, akin to “walking into a movie.”

building – guests are strongly encouraged to arrive by 6 p.m. (although it is possible to jump in later) and are asked to enter from the rear as the front doors will be locked.

Presented by Velocity Network, with support from Erie Arts & Culture and community partners, *Tethered's* lat-

est is poised to be Erie's most ambitious theatrical event of the season.
— Aaron Mook

Friday and Saturday, Sept. 19 and 20, 26
and 27 // 6 to 9 p.m. // Erie Maennerchor
Building, 1607 State St. // Tickets start at
\$35 // For info: tetheredimmersive.com



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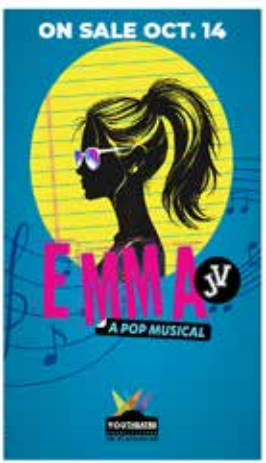
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19th Annual Homegrown Harvest Festival

The Goodell Gardens event returns this fall

SUNDAY, SEPT. 21

Support local vendors and celebrate the start of fall with Goodell Gardens & Homestead's 19th annual Homegrown Harvest Festival, a day packed with fun for the whole family. Taking place on the organization's sprawling Edinboro grounds, the festival will feature more than 50 local vendors, food trucks, and farmers, with tons of activities slated for the day. Due to the popularity of the event, times have been extended for the first time this year to allow for more activities and attendance. Admission to the event is free, and both a 50/50 raffle as well as a large raffle auction will be held. There will be a Kid's Lawn and live music

throughout the day, including performances from Touch of Grey and Matthew Crays for all to enjoy. Face painting, a kids yoga class, visits with the Tree Family Party Piggies, and other programs will go on throughout the day. "This event originally started as a mum festival but has slowly grown into an absolutely beautiful autumn event," said Goodell's events organizer Brit Skrzypczak. "It helps support our mission of creating beautiful gardens and natural spaces for people to enjoy." – Ally Kutz

11 a.m. to 6 p.m. // Goodell Gardens & Homestead, 221 Waterford St., Edinboro
// Free // For more info: goodellgardens.org/harvestfest



Always a sign of shifting seasons, Goodell Gardens and Homestead is getting ready to host their Homegrown Harvest Festival, a free event that celebrates the culmination of the summer season featuring live music, food, vendors, and activities.

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Our West Bayfront's Porch Fest 2025

Rock the block

SATURDAY, SEPT. 27

Residents on Erie's west side are coming together to bring some local music to their fellow neighbors at the Sixth Annual Porch Fest. There will be over 20 local musical acts on porches throughout the West Bayfront neighborhoods, including: Royek, Jesse James Weston, Theresa Musatto, Steve Trohoske's 814 Monk Project, Slim and Red, and many more. Our West Bayfront's (OWB's) Porch Fest began as an idea between West Bayfront residents Chuck Nelson and Dave Tamulonis, as a way for musicians to safely play live and for Erie residents to get out of their homes during the COVID pandemic.

Co-founder Dave Tamulonis said, "Our West Bayfront has been involved to help boost our ability to fundraise and plan for the event. Huge shout-out to Starla Cochenour and Marissa Litzenberg; they provide some much needed support to help grow the event each year." Since the fest began in 2020, it has grown from only a handful of bands and houses to five bands per hour for five hours, includ-

ing a headlining set by The V Band at St. Andrew's Church at 5 p.m. this year.

Organizers try to book a wide range of musicians, so that attendees can walk, bike, or drive through the neighborhood and hear an acoustic act, jazz, and rock all within a short distance. "The bands apply and are paired with a porch that fits their needs. Some larger porches fit the larger bands and solo performers can perform on stoops or small porches. Very rarely do we have to turn down an artist – the event has grown sustainably so that each year we can compensate all the artists fairly," explained Tamulonis. He went one to tell us that "many of these musicians love the event so much that they offer to donate their performance fee to the event."

There will be an information tent on the day of the event in Gridley Park (6th and Liberty), along with a fundraising merch table with PorchFest t-shirts. There will also be food and drink available for purchase by Dobbins Dogs, Erie Ale Works, and Chuck and Ginny's food truck, while The EMTA will be providing trolley

OUR WEST BAYFRONT



The West Bayfront neighborhood transforms into a day-long concert as the annual Our West Bayfront Porch Fest event continues to grow and improve. Catch five bands every hour for five hours, spread throughout homes, churches, and businesses.

rides to porches.

Porch Fests are common in communities across the nation local organizers believe it's a wonderful way to bring the community together to enjoy all the beautiful homes that make up the West Bayfront area. It's a fun and free event for the whole family,

and if you want to host one next year, or perform at one, keep an eye out for a sign up through OWB for the 2026 event. – Larry Wheaton

Noon to 5 p.m. // Various locations in the West Bayfront neighborhood // Free // For more info visit: ourwestbayfront.org

Women Rock

Third annual Female Feature Fest at Centennial Hall

SATURDAY, SEPT. 27

Erica Mayr of Eerie Siren Productions (ESP) has been a part of the Erie music scene for 18 years. ESP co-owner Tom Wurst has for 35 years. So, they've certainly seen and been a part of a lot of change in that time. When I asked Mayr how she felt about the former Basement Transmissions changing ownership and becoming Centennial Hall Erie, she had nothing but good things to say.

"I love it! It's staying open! The owners (Nicole and Jason Lavery) have been wonderful to work with... it's a place where original music in the area can still thrive. I am all for it," says Mayr.

In that spirit, the Female Feature Fest (FFF), an event dedicated to identifying females in and around the music scene, will celebrate its third year. Not only female musicians

will be highlighted, but female vendors will be in attendance (including a woman-owned tattoo shop), along with photographers, promoters, and an on-site food truck.

As far as the music goes, the lineup consists of 18 local and regional bands, with one touring act hailing all the way from Tokyo, Japan (KazHa). Also performing will be: Storms Within, Olathia, Drown the Deep, Modern Fossils, Soul Addiction, Silver Reign, Hybridnation, Victoria Fire, Battle Chapel, Ghidora, Bonded By Darkness, Reign of Z, A Common Crown, Anam Cara, Radian, Elle Taylor, The Stage of Dreams, and Gooch. Providing the fuel for the fest will be Sissy's Lunchbox, a food truck from Girard. Vendors involved include Wrapped up Craft, Hostile Creations, Shadow Knight Curiosities, Modern Ink, Slipstitch & Paint, and Wicked Pretties

"I hope we can continue to keep the

CONTRIBUTED



The Female Feature Fest, now in its second year, will bring women in rock to the forefront as organizers showcase female musicianship in an all-day event at Centennial Hall.

festival running annually," Mayr adds. "This is our third and our busiest, I would say we are expanding well." – Edwina Capozziello

2 p.m. // Centennial Hall Erie, 145 W. 11th St. // \$15 // For tickets and info: visit the Facebook event (Female Feature Fest III) or centennialhallerie.com

From Star Wars to Jurassic Park: Erie Phil Brings John Williams' Epic Scores to Life

Pops series launches with salute to Hollywood's greatest composer

BEGINNING SATURDAY, SEPT. 27

Think of nearly any epic movie from the past 50 years: *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Superman*, *Indiana Jones*,

Schindler's List, *Jurassic Park* – all of those films that have connected with generations around the world have one thing in common: the music of John Williams.



Experience the iconic music of John Williams – composer of scores that have defined generations like *Star Wars* and *Jurassic Park* – as the Erie Philharmonic performs a selection of his pieces at the historic Warner Theatre.

And now, the Erie Philharmonic is bringing those iconic soundtracks to life on the historic Warner Theatre stage for the kickoff of their 2025-2026 Hanes Erie Pops series, which will continue to include the music of Billy Joel in November and their always-popular Home for the Holidays event in December.

Executive Director of the Erie Philharmonic Bobby Pape comments, “When we talk about the American masters of the last century or so – the great exponents of who we are as a people and a country – his work stands shoulder to shoulder with everyone from Aaron Copland and William Schumann to Leonard Bernstein and Duke Ellington.”

Oftentimes, film scores are the easiest way to introduce younger generations to the power of symphonic music and the folks in the Erie Phil encourage attendees to bring the whole family along to enjoy the show. Pape continues, “Ask members of the Erie Phil or any great orchestra today what

drew them to their instruments, and many of their answers will have roots in the films they loved as kids, complete with dog-eared beginner parts and worn-out VHS tapes and DVDs.”

Additionally this month, the Philharmonic will be hosting a “Notes of the Season” fundraiser. This evening of live jazz, cocktails, and rooftop cajoling will take place on Friday, Sept. 19 at 6:30. Pape explains, “This benefit event in support of our music-making and outreach programs features an Erie Phil jazz quartet, an array of spirits from craft distillers, tasty autumnal bites, and sweeping views of downtown from the rooftop of our generous friends and hosts at Great Lakes Insurance.” Tickets are \$100 and information can be found on the Erie Phil’s website. – Erin Phillips

Saturday, Sept. 27 at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 28 at 3 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$17-\$68 // For tickets and info: eriephil.org

DIRECTED BY: KATE NEUBERT LECHNER ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: ERICA STRIPP

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EVENTS

Erie Reader Book Club: September 2025

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter by Carson McCullers

SUNDAY, SEPT. 28

The Erie Reader Book Club will be reading and discussing the novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers in correspondence with the Back to School Erie Reader issue.

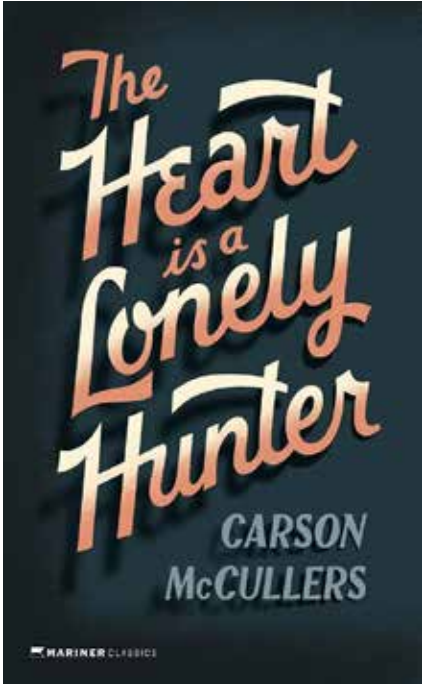
The school year often brings feelings of nostalgia for many adults, thinking back to a time when they themselves were headed back to classes, reading, and learning, with dreams of success on their minds. This month's selection was the first novel of a young writer – at the time of its publication, McCullers was only 23 years old.

Set in a small town in the Deep South, the story follows John Singer, a sympathetic and kind deaf man to whom the town finds themselves drawn. Although John lacks verbal re-

sponses to the struggles of those that visit with him, the people of the town still feel he has a unique understanding of their difficulties and continue to confide in him.

What follows is a story of those who are lost and hoping to find their way, leaning on a man who himself struggles with the loneliness brought on by his place in the world and the loss of a friend with whom he shared so much. McCullers gives voice to those who feel forgotten, bringing to life a story that has stood the test of time and cemented itself as one of the great American classics. – Ally Kutz

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



Our Hat's Off to *Spirits Off*, Mercyhurst Theatre Program's Newest Production

Original comedy conjures laughter

BEGINNING THURSDAY, OCT. 2

In the mid-19th century, a curious movement began in the New York home of the two Fox sisters, known familiarly as Maggie and Kate. What those girls would witness – nay, experience – would spearhead modern spiritualism as it's recognized today; but their story, as serious and as tragic as it was, also plays an integral role in the Mercyhurst Theatre Program's new comedy, *Spirits Off*, making its worldwide debut on the Taylor Little Theatre stage.

The play was co-written by historian and award-winning playwright Dr. Mary Barile – who also authored *A Dickens of a Carol* for the Mercyhurst Theatre Program – and the program director, Dr. Brett D. Johnson. They have set the location to none other than Erie, and the date sometime in the 1950s, with a cast of characters that include a medium-for-hire, her disreputable assistants, a wealthy widow, an unsentimental skeptic, plus an actress with a flair for the incorporeal. Taking place over the course of an evening, a séance that started out more theatrical than spiritual turns into something much spookier – and more comical (for the audience, at least).



Enjoy an originally written play performed by the student players at Mercyhurst University as they present *Spirits Off*, based on the curiously spiritual lives of Maggie and Kate Fox.

In addition to Dr. Johnson at the helm, nine Mercyhurst students will take the stage, including Noah Beiter, Haven Bills, Connor Clark, Abby Craig, Kat Kanazin, Bella Mitlo, Johnathon Morvay, Eric Page, and Zack Yeager. Behind the scenes scenic designer Tucker Topel, lighting designer Madeleine Steineck, costume designer Kim Brown, production stage man-

ager Mekenzie Rowland, and assistant stage managers Lydia Kopp, Sophia Schrader, and Kenzie Soety all played a huge role in bringing this production to life. – Cara Suppa

Oct. 2 and 4 at 7:30 p.m., Oct. 3 at 11:55 p.m., Oct. 5 at 2 p.m. // Taylor Little Theatre, 501 E. 38th // \$5-\$15 // For tickets and info: miac.mercyhurst.edu

Soweto Gospel Choir to Perform at MIAC

South African freedom songs meet gospel and classics in outstanding performance

TUESDAY, OCT. 7

The Mercyhurst Institute for Arts & Culture (MIAC) continues its 2025-2026 performance season with the Soweto Gospel Choir showcasing their vibrant new concert *Peace* at the Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center. With a program combining South African freedom songs, traditional spirituals, and beloved classic artists including Aretha Franklin, Leonard Cohen, Kate Bush, and Harry Belafonte, the Soweto Gospel Choir has earned critical acclaim across the world for their performances and compositions.

"Hailing from Soweto, the historic township outside Johannesburg that was once home to Nelson Mandela and the heart of South Africa's democratic movement, the Soweto Gospel Choir has captivated audiences worldwide with its electrifying fusion of African gospel, freedom songs, and international classics," MIAC describes. "Praised by luminaries including Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Barack Obama, and Oprah

Winfrey, this extraordinary ensemble enchants with its rich harmonies, dynamic rhythms, vibrant costumes, and an infectious spirit of joy."

Founded in November 2002 by David Mulovhedz and Beverly Bryer, the Soweto Gospel Choir was established to celebrate the heritage, languages, culture, and music of South Africa. The historical role of Soweto in helping dismantle apartheid, including the Soweto Uprising of 1976, is an important theme the group conveys to audiences. The township was also home anti-apartheid activists Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Telling their stories of the resistance to apartheid through music, current choirmaster Shimmy Jiyane explained, is a unique way of helping audiences understand the historical context and showcasing the traditions and resilience of South Africa. – Thomas Taylor

7:30 p.m. // Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. // \$25-\$50 // For tickets and info: miac.mercyhurst.edu



CHRISTINE M. KIPPER

Join in a spirited, soulful evening of "rich harmonies, dynamic rhythms, vibrant costumes, and an infectious spirit of joy" presented by the internationally renowned Soweto Gospel Choir at the Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center.



Benedictine Sisters of Erie
a monastic community that works for good

PROPHET OF PEACE AWARD
September 21 at 7:00 pm

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie present the 2025 Prophet of Peace Award to Erie native and activist Art Leopold, prophetic witness for peace and justice for more than thirty years. Celebrate Art in prayer followed by a reception at Mount St. Benedict Monastery.



LAMENT: AN OPENING TO HOPE
October 3 at 7:00 pm

Lament expresses our deep sorrow in suffering and injustice. Once acknowledged and expressed, we move to renew our hope and trust in God's faithfulness and promise. The Mercyhurst University Liturgical Dance Ensemble will join in this prayer service at Mount St. Benedict Monastery. Open to the public.

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Earl Sweatshirt
Live Laugh Love
Tan Cressida / Warner Records

★★★★★

Synonymous with wooden plaques and towel racks, “Live, Laugh, Love” has become a platitude. However, for 31-year-old Thebe Kgositsile, known as Earl Sweatshirt, the oft-memed expression represents a new lease on life. More than any release in Earl’s 15-year career, *Live Laugh Love* is the antithesis of the 2018 album *Some Rap Songs*. A reaction to his father’s passing, that project was an emotional outlet for the rapper: grief, malaise, and impostor syndrome permeated each track. Seven years later, though, Earl is at a different place. Now a husband and a father, his existential pain has given way to a joy for existence. Over chopped ‘70s gospel and soul samples, Earl leisurely waxes on about his new life: taking time to relax, watching his son crawl around, and enjoying his surroundings. The morose lyricism of the artist’s past has dissipated: near-dark Novembers replaced with sunshiny summers. For the first time in his career, Thebe feels at peace. – Nathaniel Clark



In Addendum
Sign Here
Self-released

★★★★★

One of Erie’s newest and youngest bands In Addendum have released their debut album *Sign Here*, filled with psych-pop songs and spacey instrumentals. The group consists of teenage friends Louis Rullio Johnston (13), Elliott Levy (14), Quinn Gould (14), and Lyric Bankes (16), who are all studying music and honing their craft together. The collective displays great range across the effort’s 10 tracks, from the lo-fi, Stones-inspired “Country Haze” to politically charged rockers like “Mountains of Losers” to singer-songwriter ballads like “The Invisible Man.” The album’s instrumentals are equally diverse – examples include the virtuosic “All The Water In The World” (with its opening quote of the 4th Prelude by Azerbaijani composer Elmira Nazirova), the SWANS-esque “Insubordination/Scythe,” and “The Dirty Shogun,” written in the style of Built To Spill. *Sign Here* has a lyrical playfulness that only teenagers could capture, juxtaposed with mature musicianship beyond their years. – Larry Wheaton



Abby Badach Doyle
That'll Show 'Em
Self-released

★★★★★

Bold, soulful folk and alt-country never sounded so good from Pittsburgh’s Abby Badach Doyle. Formerly of Erie, Doyle served as one-third of Gem City Revival, northwest Pennsylvania’s much-loved folk trio (while she also happens to be one of the Reader’s earliest contributing writers). Recognized for their virtuosity, intelligence, and authenticity, it’s no wonder how Doyle forged the framework to compose an EP like this, with tones and lyrical illustrations painting a sepia snapshot of a Rust Belt community reckoning with a new, more West Coast identity. With explicit references to Modesto, Los Angeles, and Santa Ana, each track on the six-song debut showcases its own personality like an actor’s headshot, complete with idiosyncrasies and facets worth examining. You can practically hear the tumbleweeds rolling in on the opening track “High Road,” with just one of the many blistering guitar solos that really take the album to the next level. Her collaboration with the Wild Rambles (including her husband and Gem City alum Patrick Doyle), Mark Omiatek, Jeff Stempka, and Mark Cimaroll end up being even more than the sum of their already-valuable parts. The second track “Great Escape” offers a rootsy composition fit for the best of the Dust Bowl. The opening fiddle line of “Modesto” showcases Doyle’s accomplished playing and serves as one of if not the most catchy (and pop-forward) tracks on the record. The spartan recording of “Good Now” gives a pastiche of Bruce Springsteen’s *Nebraska* with some much-needed levity and realness, unsurprisingly getting my award for favorite track. – Nick Warren



Gwenifer Raymond
Last Night I Heard the Dog Star Bark
We Are Busy Bodies

★★★★★

Gwenifer Raymond’s most recent release creates a wild landscape where guitars and banjos are corralled by a whisperer who respects the untamed nature of each instrument. This album exhibits the complexity of a physicist trying to mathematically define chaos. Her accomplished guitar finger-picking conjures punk rock jump scares, smoky delta blues shadows, and John Fahey’s *American Primitive* ghosts like magic. A South Wales native, Gwenifer’s instrumental voice speaks with an authority heard in the native ancient legends of the British Isles but with an accent often found in traditional Appalachian folk music. It is the same language spoken within classic folk horror pieces like *The Wicker Man*, *Children of the Stones*, and *Houses of the Holy*. Her lone-some dirges and ballads surge into a frenzied unraveling, elevating her work above typical bluegrass picking. Gwenifer creates a droning dervish, relentlessly spinning the tethered listener. She forces one to dig their heels into cool, damp earth while pulling their arms up towards breathless celestial formations. Her work exists outside any specific genre and thrives beyond the fringe. Notable tracks: “Bliws Afon Tâf,” “One Day You’ll Lie Here but Everything Will,” “Cattywomp,” and “Bonfire of the Billionaires.” – Melissa Sullivan Shimek

Downtown Movie Night is Back with Film 1020

Film Erie partners with the 1020 Collective for the Lyons-run series

By: Nick Warren

Film lovers have a reason to be happy this season – 12 reasons in particular. Film Erie (formerly the Film Society of Northwestern Pennsylvania) has teamed up with the 1020 Collective to bring back a weekly movie night in Downtown Erie. Returning to curate and co-host the film series is local filmmaker John C. Lyons. Together with co-host Erika Berlin, they deliver the spiritual successor to events like FILM at the Erie Art Museum and Dinner & A Movie at the Bourbon Barrel.

This opening slate of films will run every Wednesday from Labor Day to the week before Thanksgiving (Sept. 3 to Nov. 19). Geared to be a cinematic social experience, Film 1020 encourages active group discussions after each screening. Per its mission statement, it's designed to "feature films both old and new that reflect on humanity's enduring tension between empathy and cruelty, unity and division." Grappling with subjects like the Labor Movement as well as Israel and Palestine, there will be no shortage of things to discuss.

With doors open two hours prior to screening time, Film 1020 wants to cultivate an open environment. Guests can grab a drink or a bite to eat from an updating list of local food vendors. Early attendees may also be privy to special "secret screenings," but for more information about that,

you'll just have to stop by in person.

Wednesday, Sept. 17 *Matewan (1987)*

A labor organizer arrives at a West Virginia coal mine, where the brewing violence forces a pivotal point in 1920s American history.

Starring Chris Cooper, James Earl Jones, Mary McDonnell, and David Strathairn. Written and Directed by John Sayles. Rated R.

Wednesday, Sept. 24 *The Bibi Files (2024)*

Built around leaked tapes of the police interrogation of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, this documentary frames modern-day news amid the haze of corruption and historical revisionism. Directed by Alexis Bloom. Not Rated.

Wednesday, Oct. 1 // *The Girl with the Needle (2024)* with *Dear Neighbor: The Legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph (2025)*

A young woman in 1919 Copenhagen begins working at an underground adoption agency, where her world begins to unravel. Preceded by a locally-produced short by MenajErie Studio.

Starring Vic Carmen, Trine Dyrholm, Magnus Von Horn, and Besir Zeciri. Directed by Magnus Van Horn. Not Rated.



Film Erie (formerly the Film Society of Northwestern Pennsylvania) has partnered with the local art space 1020 Collective to present a weekly cinematic social experience with screenings of thought-provoking, relevant films.

Wednesday, Oct. 8 // *Cloud (2025)*

Exploring themes of technology, greed, social media, and mind control, this film follows a factory worker moonlighting as an online reseller who quickly becomes involved in a world much deeper and dangerous than he had expected. Starring

Masaki Suda. Written and Directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa. Rated R.

Doors at 5 p.m., Film at 7 p.m. // 1020 Holland St. // \$10 admission, food and drink available // Mature audiences, some films Rated R // For tickets and more info: tickets.eriereader.com

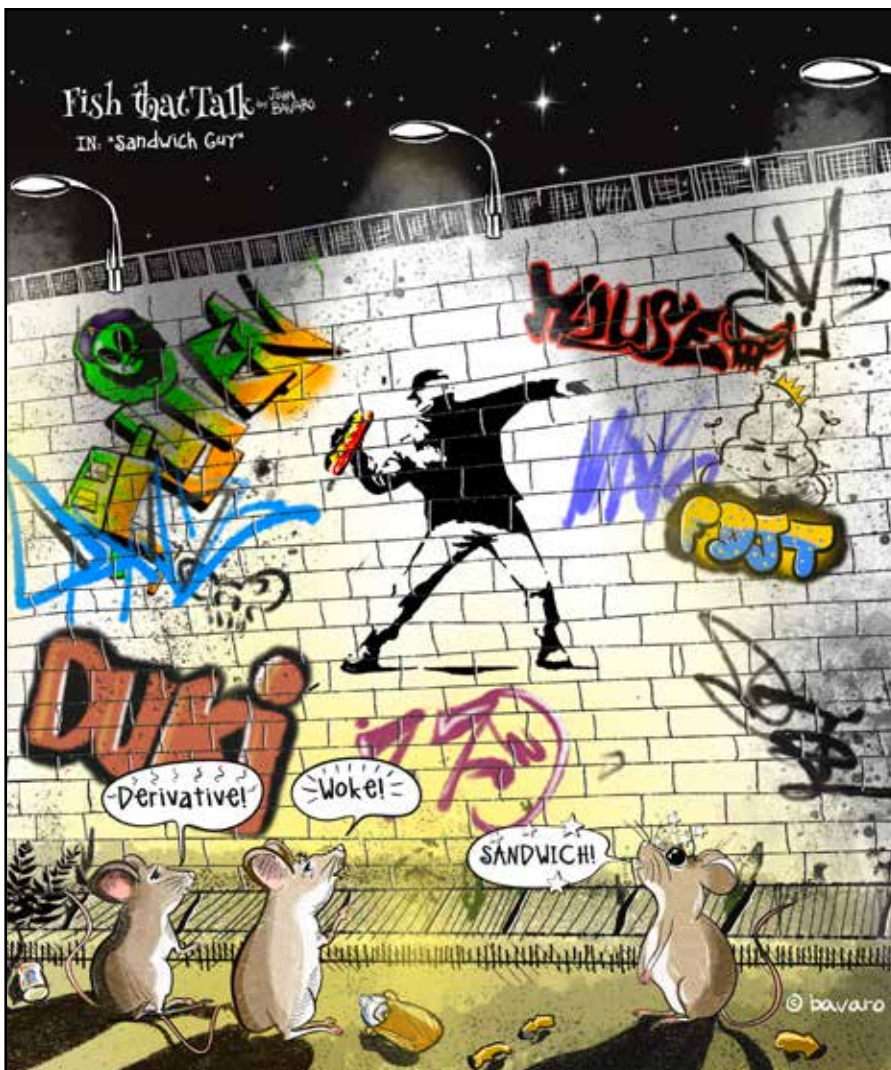
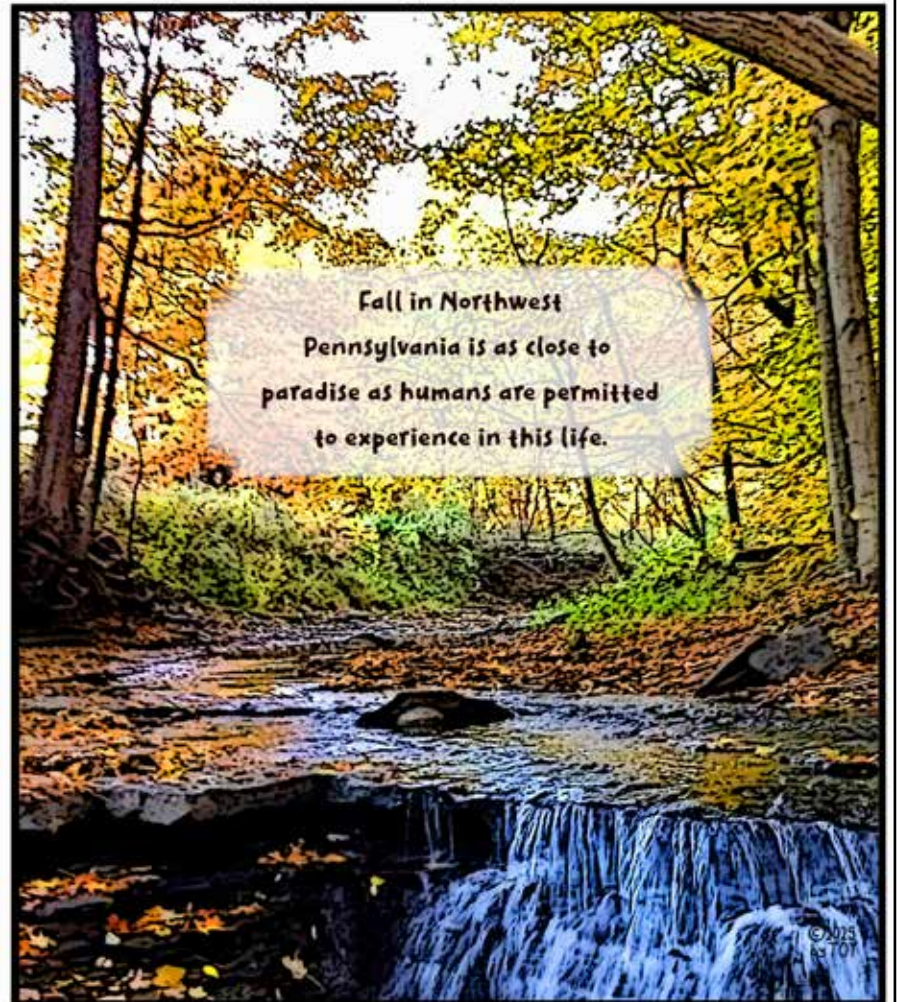


DRAWING A COMIC

BY BRAD PATTUCCI
@2025
bradpattu.com



JUST TOYIN' WITCHA — BY B. TOY



Caught Stealing is a Pulp, Entertaining Throwback

★★★★★

Swing for the fences

Darren Aronofsky isn't known for subtlety. His films feature grand (in some cases, biblical) ambitions and are filled with intense, emotional performances bordering on melodrama. Not exactly the first name one thinks of to make an exciting, propulsive throwback to post-Tarantino crime comedies. And that is exactly what makes his newest film *Caught Stealing* such a joy. By stepping outside of his comfort zone and making a pulpy thriller with a delightfully punk style of humorous cynicism, Aronofsky has made one of his best films to date.

Set in New York City circa 1998, the film follows Hank Thompson (Austin Butler), a washed-up former baseball prodigy who suddenly finds himself babysitting a cat after his punker neighbor (Matt Smith) has to leave town for a few days. What seems like a simple task soon becomes anything but when thugs come to his apartment asking questions he doesn't know the answers to.

Now Hank is on the run from an assortment of colorful killers all looking for a mysterious key, and he must figure out what his neighbor is involved with if he hopes to get out of this alive. Much like Scorsese's *After Hours* and the aforementioned Tarantino knockoffs, Aronofsky keeps the suspense jacked up by raising the stakes higher and higher,



and Butler does good work in his "everyman in the wrong place at the wrong time" role. It is also extremely funny, but Aronofsky knows when to cut the humor for his trademark pathos as the bodies start piling up. With a tight script, memorable characters, and brutal action sequences, Aronofsky proves that he can do genre films just as good as anyone. – Forest Taylor

Directed by Darren Aronofsky // Written by Charlie Huston, based on his novel // Starring Austin Butler, Regina King, Zoe Kravitz, Matt Smith, Liev Schreiber, Vincent D'Onofrio, Griffin Dunne, Nikita Kuchukhin, Yuri Kolokolnikov, Bad Bunny, George Abud, Will Brill. D'Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai, Action Bronson, Carol Kane, and Tonic the Cat // Sony Pictures // 107 minutes // Rated R

The Toxic Avenger is a Polished Troma Film... If That's Your Thing

Remake offers raunchy fun, but loses schlocky charm of original

★★★★★

It was left in limbo for over two years, but the much-anticipated remake of 1980s cult horror/superhero/comedy *The Toxic Avenger* finally gets a limited theatrical run to the delight of gore freaks everywhere. Directed by Macon Blair (*I Don't Feel at Home in This World Anymore*) and distributed by the company that made those stomach-churning *Terrifier* movies such hits, it, much like the excellent reboot of *The Naked Gun*, goes in its own direction while still maintaining the tone and feel of its predecessor. While it certainly looks more polished and professional than Lloyd Kaufman's schlock masterpiece, it also loses some of that bargain-basement energy.

The film follows Winston Gooze (Peter Dinklage), a lowly janitor working for a shady pharmaceutical company, who suffers a horrible accident involving toxic chemical waste. The chemicals transform Winston into a hideously deformed creature with superhuman strength who then uses his powers to rid the city of crime and corruption. While winning the hearts of the good citizens, he also tries to reconnect with his teenage stepson, Wade (Jacob Tremblay).

While this film is not without its share of nauseating violence, it also has some unexpectedly engaging characters to hold interest. That said, it lacks some of the heart of the original, which, despite its



grossness, also worked as a surprisingly sweet love story. And most of the gore effects are unconvincing CGI, lessening the impact of the kills (where's a melon with a wig on it when you need one?). However, it has enough raunchiness and low-brow humor to make any Troma fan happy (guilty!), but I doubt it will have much appeal beyond that. Now bring on the remake of *Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.*! – Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Macon Blair // Based on an original story by Lloyd Kaufman // Starring Peter Dinklage, Jacob Tremblay, Taylour Paige, Julia Davis, Sarah Niles, Macon Blair, Jonny Coyne, Atanas Srebrev, Lee Eddy, Lloyd Kaufman, Elijah Wood, and Kevin Bacon // Legendary Pictures Troma Entertainment // 102 minutes // Unrated (R equivalent)

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Tethered

IMMERSIVE • THEATRICAL • EXPERIENCE

September 19, 20, 26, 27
1607 State Street, Erie, Pennsylvania
tickets.eriereader.com

The Story

In the near future, past and present reunite through an experimental new technology that enables a former dancer with Alzheimer's (Solveig Santillano) and her neurologist son (Matthew King) to experience her memories. Together, they revisit a place and people of significance during a tragic event, while her son attempts to heal her mind and uncover the identity of his father.

The Experience

Founded in 2023 by award-winning filmmaker, John C. Lyons, Tethered is Erie's first immersive theater company. Dance, theater, music, film, and technology creatives collaborate to craft emotional and unforgettable audience experiences that blur the boundaries between performer and spectator. As audiences explore the 30,000 sq. ft. former Maennerchor building, they'll have opportunities to engage with performers and immerse themselves in the story's world.

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CROSSWORD

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11	12	
13			14		15				16					
17				18					19					
20									21			22		
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45	46							47						
48				49		50	51				52	53	54	55
56			57			58								
59						60					61			
62						63						64		

Across

1. Pose a question
4. "Clue" hue
8. Aesopian story
13. "Nashville sound" musician Atkins
15. Hillbilly
16. Shaq's last name
17. No-win situations
19. Ancient object
20. Box for pets to stretch out on during a heat wave?
22. Bed-___-bag
23. "It's... just OK"
24. Dozing
26. Deals with problems
29. Last of a tetralogy
31. Carry-alls that divide your picnic into equal portions?
35. Browser indicators
36. Pond fish
37. McClurg of "Ferris Bueller's Day Off"
38. Extra spray after doing a cannonball?
43. Apprehensive
44. Group of at least 95 for Jupiter
45. Salad with romaine lettuce
47. Company discontinuing their most notable (in the 1990s) service as of September 30
48. Finished off

49. Devices to catch immobilized broken bones?
56. Quickly greet someone
58. Fashion aesthetic mashup of fast punk and local music
59. Ideology
60. Hairstyle with a pick
61. Neighborhood
62. Supermarket pathway
63. Faucet brand
64. Pulse stat
- Down
1. Isn't idle
2. Sailing vessel
3. ... and part of its hull
4. Dissent
5. "Wednesday" butler
6. Rideshare app
7. Flat-top landform
8. Wooded areas
9. "I'd like to buy ___" ("Wheel of Fortune" line)
10. Trusted
11. "Blazing Saddles" theme singer Frankie
12. Yosemite landmark climbed in "Free Solo," familiarly
14. General on menus
18. Space streaker
21. "Sharknado" actress Reid

25. Thusly
26. Machine that helps with apnea
27. Sinatra sobriquet
28. Italians from a tower city
29. Authorized stand-in
30. Somewhat
31. GPS lines
32. ___ out a win
33. Brothers of madres
34. 1 of 100 in D.C.
39. Oregon Coast city with a self-descriptive name
40. Plucked instrument
41. Passion
42. Murphy's "48 HRS." costar
45. Assassin of 45-Across
46. 1980s console
47. "Giant" of pro wrestling
50. Brother in the 2025 Oasis reunion concert
51. Lowdown
52. Co. that once owned NBC
53. 50-50 choice, perhaps
54. Meal ___
55. Line of stitching
57. Loki's daughter, Norse goddess of the underworld



Answers to last puzzle

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

CALENDAR

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Fri 9/12

State Street Salon

@ 5pm / Free
cafeGIANT, 1311 State Street

Cole Swindell w/ Priscilla Block

@ 7pm
Erie Insurance Arena

Sat 9/13

Featured



STIM CITY: CHROME JUNGLE

@ 10pm / \$10
Sep 13th - Sep 14th
FEED Media Art Center,
1307 State Street



Wed 9/17

Featured



Matewan [FILM 10|20]
@ 7pm / \$10
The 1020 Collective, 1020
Holland Street



Fri 9/19

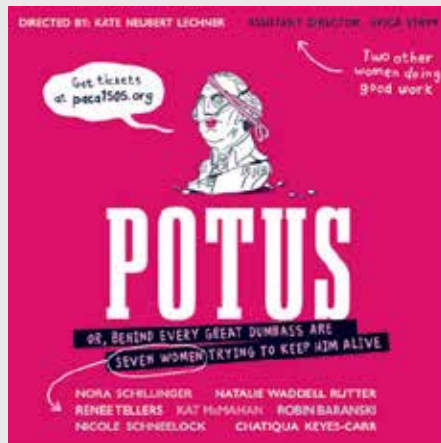
Lake Erie Listening Project | FEEDworks | Brocki

@ 12pm / \$5
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Candlelight: Queen vs. ABBA

@ 9:30pm / \$22
The Masonic Temple of Erie, 32 West 8th Street. fever@eventvesta.com

Featured



POTUS

@ 7pm / \$20
PACA, 1505 State Street



Sat 9/20

Mutt Mile Charity Run

@ 9am / \$25-\$25
2421 Asbury Rd

Featured



Erie Roller Derby's

September
doubleheader
@ 4:30pm / \$10
Bayfront Convention Center,
1 Sassafra Pier



Tethered Immersive Theatrical Experience

@ 6pm / \$35-\$125
Erie Maennerchor, 1607 State Street

POTUS

@ 7pm / \$20
PACA, 1505 State Street

STIM CITY: SUBMERGE

@ 10pm / \$10
Sep 20th - Sep 21st
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Thu 9/25

Lake Erie Listening Project | FEEDworks | Brocki

@ 12pm / \$5
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Fri 9/26

Lake Erie Listening Project | FEEDworks | Brocki

@ 12pm / \$5
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

State Street Salon

@ 5pm / Free
cafeGIANT, 1311 State Street

Tethered Immersive Theatrical Experience

@ 6pm / \$35-\$125
Erie Maennerchor, 1607 State Street

Farm-to-Table Dinner at the White House in Girard SEPT. 26

@ 6:30pm / \$150
Battles White House, 306 Walnut Street, Girard

Vinyl & Flow

@ 7pm / Free
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

POTUS

@ 7pm / \$20
PACA, 1505 State Street

Sat 9/27

Knightmare Dash 5k

@ 9am / Free
Gannon University Recreation & Wellness Center, 130
W 4th St

Wine Fest 5k

@ 9am / \$15-\$15
Park St. & Gibson St --northwest corner of Gibson
Park, North East

Lake Erie Listening Project | FEEDworks | Brocki

@ 12pm / \$5
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Wed 10/01

The Girl With The Needle | Dear Neighbor
short film [FILM 10|20]

@ 7pm / \$10
The 1020 Collective, 1020 Holland Street

Fri 10/03

Featured



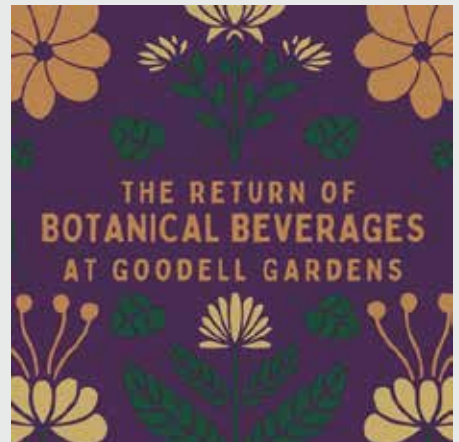
Future Joy

@ 9pm / \$7
King's Rook Club, 1921
Peach Street



Sat 10/04

Featured



Botanical Beverages

@ 6pm / \$30-\$45
Goodell Gardens &
Homestead, 221 Water-
ford Street, Edinboro



Sun 10/05

Mount Pleasant Challenge

@ 9:30am / \$5-\$60
14510 Mount Pleasant Road, Cambridge Springs

Wed 10/08

Cloud [FILM 10|20]

@ 7pm / \$10
The 1020 Collective, 1020 Holland Street

Fri 10/10

Featured



**Headliner Ariel Elias at
Werner Books and
Coffee**

@ 7pm / \$15-\$20
Werner Books and Cof-
fee, 3608 Liberty Street



Hadestown: Teen Edition

@ 7pm / \$15
PACA, 1505 State Street

Calendar information is provided by event organizers.
All events are subject to change or cancellation. This
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information contained in this calendar.