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This week’s latest stumper from David Levinson Wilk

From the Editors:

Welcome, Erie enthusiasts to I2E Madness.

We have Erie’s best businesses all here throwing the hammer down for “Industry, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship” this fine issue. They’re giving it their all, and you and I know it’s been one heck of a preseason. Get your brackets ready, or better yet, your parentheses — or your em dashes — because we’re ready to start things off if you are.

Bang!

Once again as a top seed, we have The State of Erie Industry. For the fourth time in five years, we see this feature returning and it’s easy to see why. Led by Jim Wertz, this feature is ready to examine the ins and outs of what makes Erie tick when it comes to business, employment, and the new challenges and opportunities our community has in store. With an assist from star player Ken Louie, director of the Economic Research Institute at Penn State Behrend, Wertz is set to take this all the way.

One of the emerging stars on the scene has undoubtedly got to be Erie’s beehives. Now, what’s the buzz? You have organizations like Penn State Behrend in the east, Edinboro University in the south, Mercyhurst University in the midwest, The Erie County Public library representing the north, and from downtown, Gannon University! While it’s not a R1 (Research 1) conference, we’re able to see some fancy footwork and nice cooperation to make things happen. Will Ben Speggen have what it takes to bring home the honey? Hard work and research hint that the answer will be a resounding yes.

And in a joint effort, we have spotlights on local businesses coming back to I2E for the third straight year in a row. Jonathan Burdick passes to Rebecca Styn, who hands the ball off to Matt Swanseger for a real team effort. They each have their eyes on two local businesses that we’re eager to highlight, from startups to large corporations, these Erie stars are dotting their i’s and crossing their t’s.

Oh me, oh my. As we get ready to enter the post-season, it’s time to gear up for Erie’s 40 Under 40. Making its third consecutive appearance in I2E is our 40 Under 40 Follow Up. Cara Suppa takes a time out and confers with three past hall-of-famers: Gisele Littrell of the Topsy Bean, Courtney Steading of Penn State Behrend, and Matt Wiertel of Velocity Network. These three have been making strides and are set to take things to the next level.

Lastly and not leastly, we have Nick Warren and his team of franchise owners all set to make their first appearance in I2E. This crew has the fundamentals down and are turning up the heat, with star players like Chris N. Scott, Dale McBrier, and Christine Vogel. This group is making their case for how franchises and chains fit into the community. It’s a team effort and they are determined to make the best of their home court advantage.

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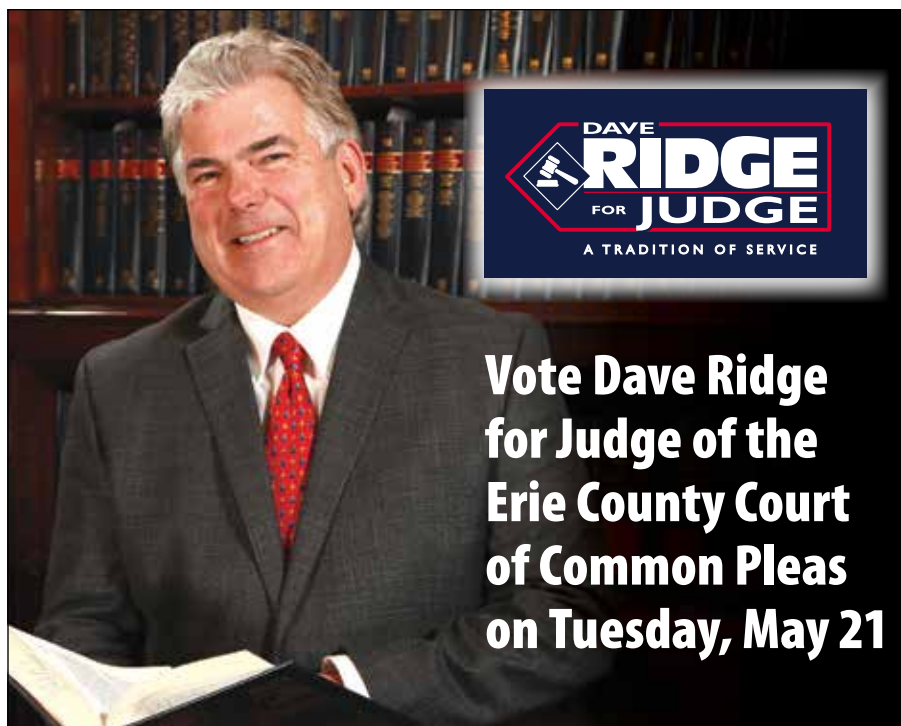
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State of Erie Industry 2019

New opportunities emerge, but will Erie's labor force have the skills to capitalize?



Diversification of the local economy has forestalled Erie's progress for decades. With the emergence of new employment sectors, it's vital the city provide the resources necessary to train the workforce of the future.

decades to come.

"The objective of business leaders and elected leaders is to try to increase prosperity in the broadest way," says Dr. Ken Louie, an economist, and director of the Economic Research Institute of Erie at Penn State Behrend. "I think they're trying to boost the dynamism of the economy and that's why the main initiatives you're seeing are things like the Innovation District and the revitalization of the bayfront. These things help to boost the overall economy."

That dynamism has been an important part of the American economic story as the United States has made the shift from traditional machine-based manufacturing to advanced industries and the advanced services that support them.

Among Erie's advanced industries, Wabtec — formerly GE Transportation — remains the largest advanced manufacturer in the region. The inauspicious transition at the Lawrence Park facility culminated in a strike of more than 1,700 workers during the first days of Wabtec control after the company ceased negotiations with the leadership of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers locals 506 and 618 on the first day of business. The strike lasted nine days until the two sides reached a mediated 90-day agreement that brought them back to the bargaining table.

"Neither side wants to see things deteriorate," says Louie. "I think it's likely that both sides will compromise and they'll come up with an agree-

ment that is mutually satisfactory because it is still an important part of the Erie economy."

Indeed, the loss of jobs as Erie's largest manufacturer would be catastrophic to the local economy with a total economic impact of between \$8 million and \$15 million and as many as 102 non-Wabtec jobs throughout the community, according to an economic impact study by consulting firm Parker Phillips.

Across Erie County, unemployment slowed recently. Seasonally adjusted unemployment is at 4.1 percent, its lowest level in years and just 0.1 percent higher than national unemployment. That's in part because of the number of people who have dropped out of the labor market. Essentially, they've stopped trying.

As of 2017, Erie's labor force participation rate — the number of people over the age of 16 who are employed or actively looking for a job — was just 58.7 percent, the lowest it's been in more than a decade. Part of that story is the relative age of our working population and another part of that story is the skills gap that keeps many people from the high-tech industries that are emergent in the region.

"When you look at the structure of the economy," Louie says, "what's causing a lot of the trauma is that even when there's job growth, it's growth in the newer sectors or in the service sectors and so given our reliance historically on the traditional manufacturing sectors like metals production and locomotive production, that's where we see the transition being very difficult for workers."

Louie says you can see this change when you look at the economic output of specific industries. While the major industries like locomotive production remain critical to

the local economy, the largest growth is in areas like computer and electronic parts, which experienced a 240 percent increase in real output between 2001 and 2016, and continues to grow. Printing and related activities locally grew 100 percent during the same period.

These industries are smaller and more nimble than the traditional manufacturing institutions that came before them, but they generally produce high-wage jobs that have supported the American economy since the last recession.

Preparing the workforce for such jobs is now Erie's cross to bear.

Every other community in the United States with economic growth in advanced industries and services has a mechanism to train its skilled workforce. In some communities that effort is led by organized labor, as the Steamfitters local 449 has done in Harmony, Pennsylvania, and in other communities, it is a combination of public and private entities collaborating to stabilize its workforce. But in every community having economic success, there is a common denominator: proximity to a community college.

Erie is the largest metropolitan statistical area in the country without a brick-and-mortar community college and whether or not one is established in Erie County will be the difference between regional progress or the continued stagnation of the local economy — industrial, commercial, and personal.

There is simply no alternative if our goal is to prosper and grow.

Jim Wertz is a contributing editor and the Chairman of the Erie County Democratic Party. He can be reached at jWertz@ErieReader.com or you can follow him on Twitter @jim_wertz

By: Jim Wertz

Change is happening in Erie, Pennsylvania. The community is at a tipping point, facing some degree of promise that — all things being fair, if not equal — it will be able to navigate toward a new economic normal that stabilizes the local economy and promotes demographic growth among the people and businesses that call Erie County home.

Those changing demographics — something other than a story of growth in recent years — underscore the challenges of a community working to redefine itself in a rapidly changing world.

At last estimate, Erie County's population had declined to 274,541 — down 0.6 percent since the previous year and more than 5,000 people fewer than the population estimate in 2009, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

But to dwell on those numbers alone would be to do a disservice to the better picture and the stronger story, which is that like its economy, Erie County is becoming more nimble and capable of adapting to changes beyond our control from beyond the county line.

For decades, as industry left Erie and manufacturing changed into something that looked different than what we had always known, the political and business leadership in

this community sought to replace that industry with something similar, and even those opportunities became fewer and fewer.

The failure to diversify the local economy during the past generation left Northwest Pennsylvania and the City of Erie as one of the slowest growing places in America, according to U.S. Census data analyzed by Wallethub, one of the many online ventures to offer context-free rankings of this region in the past two years.

Local leadership recently began to look differently upon the opportunities to grow the Erie economy and we find ourselves, perhaps, nearer to a new beginning.

Erie Insurance is now the largest employer in Erie County and is expanding its footprint throughout downtown Erie through its support of the Erie Downtown Development Corporation; Mercyhurst University breathed life into the Innovation District that now resides within the new Velocity Network headquarters in downtown Erie; and the region's four universities are collaborating in what's called the Innovation Beehive Network to support startup entrepreneurship throughout Erie County. These public-private partnerships underscore the philosophical change in the local economic development sphere and provide a catalyst for economic growth in the de-

Making It Work

Manufacturers aim to build skilled workforce



LIZ ALLEN

By: Liz Allen

A visit to two local shops illustrates why manufacturing continues to play a pivotal role in Erie's economy — and provides lessons on how to keep it that way.

With two facilities in Erie and one in Wattsburg, Custom Engineering serves a worldwide, diverse market. Its products include giant oil pans for locomotives made in Erie, curved metal bumpers for a new thrill ride at Universal Studios in Orlando, and heavy metal platens that crush wood chips into oriented strand board, sold by Louisiana Pacific for decking.

In addition to making parts for the former GE Transportation plant in Erie, now owned by Wabtec in Pittsburgh, Custom Engineering makes components for GE in Grove City, Pa., Schenectady, N.Y., and Greenville, S.C.

"GE has always been a major customer for us," said James Ohrn, vice president and chief financial officer for Custom Engineering, 2800 McClelland Ave.

Like other local manufacturers that are part of the GE supply chain, Custom Engineering is hopeful that the recent sale of GE Transportation to Wabtec results in stable employment — and potential job growth — at the locomotive plant in Lawrence Park.

Custom Engineering is also pursuing solutions to a challenge that faces other Erie manufacturers: hiring, keeping and re-training skilled workers. To meet that challenge, Custom Engineering is about to embark on an in-house apprenticeship program, building on what the company learned when it partnered with Clarion University of Pennsylvania 15 years ago to train welders on site.

"We probably trained over 100 men and women on how to weld," said Ohrn. The company still employs about 70 percent of those workers. "Our welding pipeline is working out pretty well," he said. Today, Custom trains welders for five weeks in its warehouse; welders are then mentored for three months on the shop floor.

Custom Engineering is hopeful that a partnership with the Regional Career & Technical Center, the adult education program at Erie County Technical School, will train the new generation of machinists. Kit Carson will teach the 10-month course, which will take place at Custom Engineering, on a schedule that fits with the shifts of employees and is tailored for Custom Engineering's unique needs.

"CNC machinists are hard to come by," said Ohrn. "People with high skills are retiring and young people are moving to office management."

In today's manufacturing plants, machinists need to do more than push buttons. They need to read blueprints, understand higher-level math, have good communication skills and be familiar with G-coding, the language used for CNC machining.

Robin Scheppner, president and CEO of American Tinning & Galvanizing, 552 W. 12th St., is a member of Erie Mayor Joe Schember's Business Advisory Council. A recent meeting included a "very spirited discussion about workforce development," including the shortage of machinists and commercial truck drivers, she said.

American Tinning & Galvanizing does metal finishing to protect parts against rust and corrosion. Its customers include GE (Wabtec) and aerospace manufacturers such as Belle, Sikorsky and Parker Hannifin. It also has local customers, including Lord Corp., Acutec Precision Aerospace, Urick Foundry (just up the street at 1501 Cherry), and Ridg-U-Rak in North East, whose products include shelving for home and garden centers at

[top left] Like many manufacturers in Erie, Custom Engineering needs CNC machinists. The company will soon launch an on-site training program to upgrade employee skills to meet demand. [top right] Robin Scheppner, president and CEO of American Tinning & Galvanizing at 552 W. 12th St., shows bolts made by Urick Foundry, just blocks away at 1501 Cherry St. The bolt on the left has gone through American Tinning & Galvanizing's treatment, which protects aluminum and steel from corrosion. "We put the metal finish on metal parts made by other manufacturers," Scheppner explained. [bottom right] This metal bumper, made by Custom Engineering in Erie, will be used by a Maryland company for a ride at Universal Studios in Orlando, Fla. James Ohrn, vice president and CFO for Custom Engineering, went on a similar ride with his grandchildren at Disney World. The ride rotates as passengers shoot at targets with a laser gun, he said.

Lowe's and Walmart. She marvels that those racks, made in North East from American steel, with components galvanized at West 12th and Cherry in Erie, are in use all over the country. "They might end up in Topeka," she said.

At American Tinning & Galvanizing, employment has doubled from the 42 people who worked there when Scheppner started in 2004.

But her company has trouble "getting people for OJT — on-the-job training," she said.

That's why she is an outspoken proponent of United Way of Erie County's community schools program, which aims to give students skills to get on a career path. The program provides school children with access to social services, so they can overcome any barriers to a quality education.

Scheppner's commitment to the community schools program persuaded Ohrn that Custom Engineering should

become a corporate sponsor of the new community school at Diehl Elementary, 2327 Fairmount Parkway. Three of the eight corporate sponsors are also on Erie's east side: Reddog Industries, McInnes Rolled Rings, and Team Hardinger.

Ohrn, chairman of the Community Impact Committee for United Way, said it's important to reach youngsters early, as young as Pre-K, to make sure they are able to read and to prepare them for future job opportunities in Erie. "Our focus is to take the limited resources that we have and try to invest them in ways that are making an impact," said Ohrn. "We're passionate about that."

Liz Allen has long understood how important manufacturing is to Erie because her late husband, Pat Locco, was vice president of the Manufacturer & Business Association in Erie. You can reach her at lizallenerie@gmail.com.



LIZ ALLEN



LIZ ALLEN

Training days



Kit Carson, a retired adult education teacher, will provide 10 months of specialized training to machinists at Custom Engineering.

workers to stay with the company, he said.

Carson had worked at Joy Manufacturing in Franklin and Oil Well Supply in Oil City when he decided he needed to go to college after being laid off. He started at Alliance College, but transferred to Edinboro after it closed, where he earned his degree in manufacturing engineering.

A U.S. Navy veteran, he's run his own general contracting company and coached wrestling, soccer and baseball. He's also trained body builders. Just as in any classroom, students — even adults — can get unruly. To keep order, Carson employs all of his career, military, and coaching experience.

James Ohrn, vice president and chief financial officer for Custom Engineering, is excited about the training program Carson will lead. It's an apprenticeship program designed to match Custom Engineering's needs. It will take place at the plant, not at the technical school. Employees will learn about manual and computer numeric controlled machining. They will study math, blueprint reading, and safety. They will also learn about CAD-CAM (computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing). And as they progress, they will boost their earning power.

Carson said that designing such a customized job training program has been "a dream of mine for years." It could also become a dream realized for other Erie manufacturers, searching for the right tools to create and keep a skilled workforce. — Liz Allen

When Kit Carson teaches new skills to adults working in manufacturing, he can relate to their challenges.

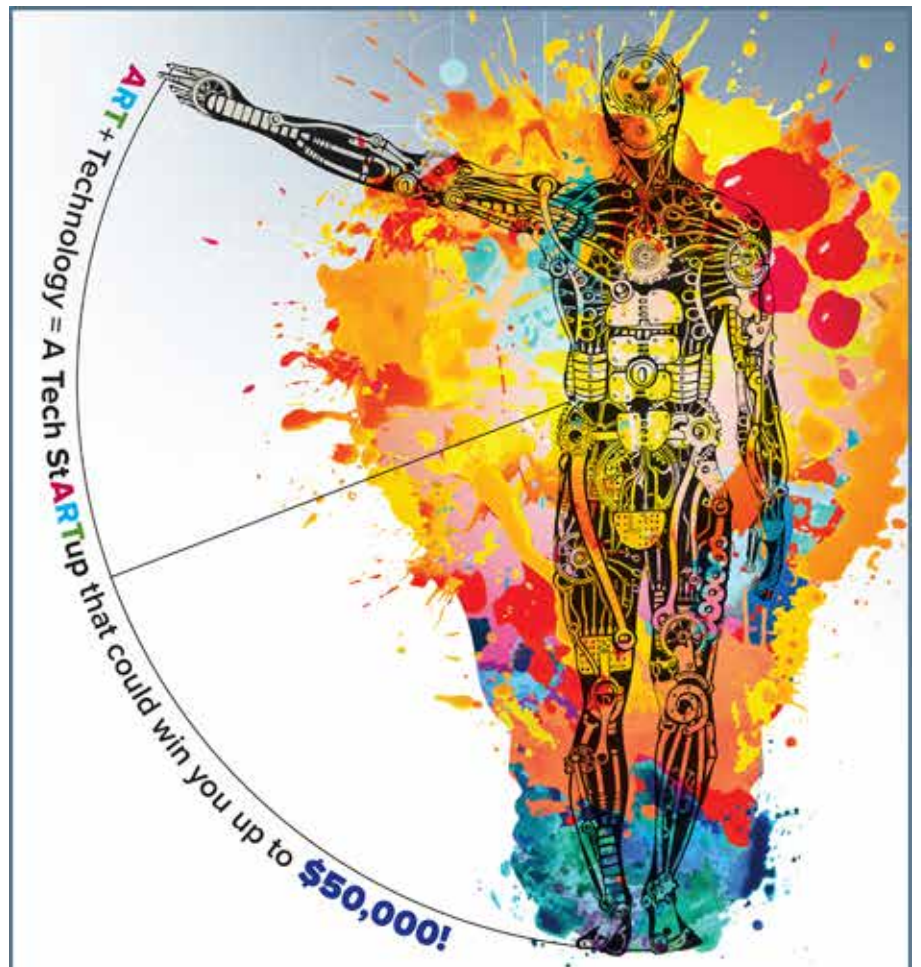
Years ago, he was a tool-and-die maker who decided to get a college degree after one too many layoffs.

He also has a learning disability — dyslexia. "I had to read things four, five, six times to get it," he tells the students. "There's nothing in here that you can't learn that I teach," he reassures them. "There's nothing you can't do because I've done it."

Carson, 72, is retired from the Regional Career & Technical Center at the Erie County Technical School but he readily agreed when Custom Engineering Co. asked him to design a curriculum for workers already employed at the plant, 2800 McClelland Ave.

Carson will teach the classes in two-month modules. That allows him to take vacations with his wife, Deborah. The breaks also will insure that workers don't miss classes for their vacations. Offered three days a week, the classes will be divided into two 3-hour increments that align with first- and second-shift schedules.

Carson describes his training plan as "very bold," because it calls for raises for workers when they successfully pass tests. That's an incentive for



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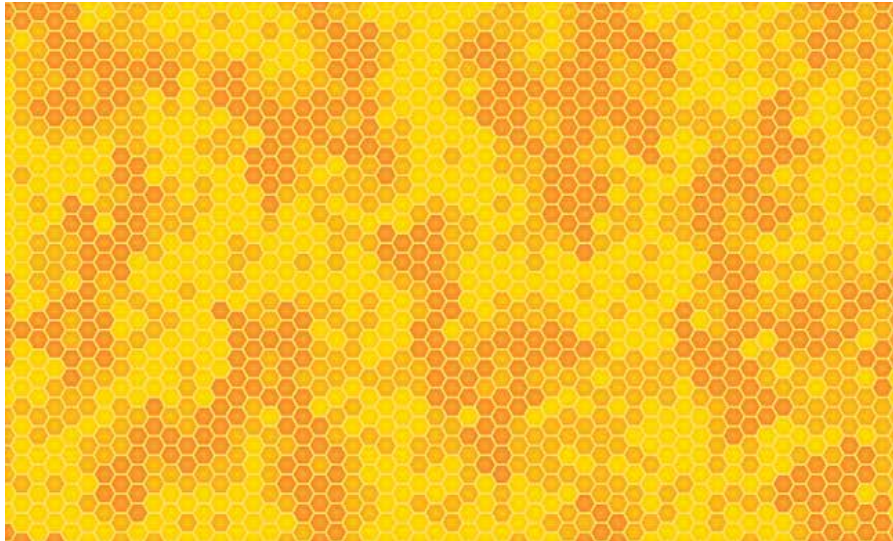
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Combing for Ideas

NWPA Innovation Beehive bringing buzz to Erie community



SOLARUS

By: Ben Speggen

“An interesting example.” That’s what Washington Post columnist David Ignatius, who visited in October 2018 as part of the Jefferson Educational Society’s Global Summit, called Erie in a March 19 op-ed in search of “the right answer for Rust Belt towns where the old manufacturing base has disappeared.”

For many, part of that answer is beehives.

While it hasn’t disappeared, the decline of old manufacturing isn’t a new story for Erie. In 1980 — around the same time Pittsburgh’s economic rock was meeting its bottom before the Steel City would go on to become a three-decades-long rebounding and resounding success story (it was the only U.S. city to land on the U.K. *National Geographic Traveler’s* 2019 Cool List) — the Erie region boasted some 45,000 manufacturing jobs. That accounted for 40 percent of private employment.

The numbers have since met a buzzsaw that cut them nearly in half. Less than 26,000 jobs exist, accounting for 20 percent of employment, according to a 2016 report by Mark Muro, Brookings Institution Senior Fellow in the Metropolitan Policy Programming Division.

Yet, more than half of the “Advanced Industries” — “50 critical manufacturing, energy, and service industries that invest most in R&D and STEM workers” — Brookings first identified back in 2015 exist in Erie. During a recent conversation with Muro, he said updated data will soon be available.

Since 2015, Erie hasn’t necessarily shouted “out with the old,” but it’s certainly championed “in with the new.”

Erie is “rebuilding itself around its local universities and a big insurance company,” Ignatius wrote. “Profits from a big gambling casino in Erie County are funneled partly to ‘innovation spaces’ at four local campuses.”

The local universities with those innovation spaces supported by casino funds is the equation that equals the Northwest Pennsylvania Innovation Beehive Network.

Six entities are key to understanding the Network: The four local universities (Gannon, Edinboro, and Mercyhurst universities and Penn State Behrend), as well as the Erie County Public Library each host a hive — and the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority, which has drafted a blueprint for the innovation-based economic development system in Erie.

The work began back in 2013 when ECGRA Executive Director Perry Wood brought Pittsburgh native Richard Bendis, CEO and founder of Innovation America (a national public-private partnership focused on accelerating the growth of innovation economy in America), to Erie for Ignite Erie: A Day of Innovation for Entrepreneurs.

Out of that came the second phase of Ignite Erie in 2015, which included the idea to begin having local universities collaborate for the greater good of Erie’s economic ecosystem.

The Beehive Network “is about leveling the playing field for the entrepreneurs of Erie County,” says Wood. “It’s about opening the doors of our

The Northwest Pennsylvania Innovation Beehive Network — a collaboration between our four local universities and the Erie County Public Library, funded by the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority — seeks to turn the nectar of ideas and young entrepreneurial talent into the honey that is money for our local economy.

universities to the community because not every entrepreneurial idea is born out of a physics class. In essence, we’re democratizing entrepreneurship with the help of the universities.”

At its most basic, the concept can be seen as a “many hands make lighter work” approach to advancing Erie’s economy but with the note that each hand is holding something different.

“The decision to designate an area for each university was key,” says Tony Peyronel, executive director of Edinboro University’s Center for Branding and Strategic Communication. “There is no overlap in competition when it comes to that.”

Too, the four, smaller universities working together can match the might of Research 1 (R1) universities — a classification for institutions offering numerous doctoral programs and very high levels of research activity — which the Erie region lacks.

“R1s are more successful in attracting larger businesses and creating cottage industries,” says Brad Gleason, director of operations at the Tom Ridge College of Intelligence Studies and Applied Sciences at Mercyhurst University. “And so for our region to be useful in the economic development space, there is a collective belief that we need to start acting together in regards to generating business.”

But collaboration between colleges? It’s easier to think of the academic arena as Gonzaga versus North Carolina or Michigan State versus University of Tennessee — and not just because March Madness happens to be upon us.

But the Lions teamed up with the Golden Knights, the Fighting Scots, and the Lakers — as well as the Librarians! — to advance business development in the region.

The initiative — which initially received a \$200,000 Appalachian Regional Commission grant with a dollar-for-dollar match by the Ignite Erie

Industry+University Business Acceleration Collaborative in October 2017 — was first coordinated by Penn State Behrend, which opened the first hive, theirs dedicated to design and engineering support for prospective businesses.

The other hives followed: Gannon’s focused on business development and analysis; Edinboro’s on public relations and marketing; Mercyhurst’s on business intelligences studies; and the library through its Idea Lab, which Emerging Technologies Librarian Jude Shingle calls “a feeder system into the other beehives,” noting that the Idea Lab serves as “a great first step in giving feedback and guidance on who can help and what resources are available.”

“The beehives are what will turn our innovators into entrepreneurs,” says Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper. “There are so many dreams out there in our community just waiting to be brought to life — and that’s why it is so important to have the Idea Lab as part of the beehives. As part of the library, it welcomes all citizens, from all walks of life, and helps them take their idea, their innovation, their dream and work with the Beehive Network to make it a reality.”

The complexity — and heightened pace — of the global economy has made scaling a company from a garage to somewhere on a Fortune magazine list more of an exception than the norm.

“The innovation space the beehives create bridges the local and the global,” Wood adds, creating access to networks of people and resources to be better positioned to develop their product and market and commercialize it at a faster pace.

In December 2018, ECGRA injected \$1 million of additional funding into the Network — \$200,000 to each hive — which since launching has “seen more than 100 clients; employed 50 students; helped with the formation of two businesses; developed 15 business plans, seven intelligence studies and 21 marketing concepts; and designed three prototypes,” as Erie Times-News Matthew Rink reported.

“[Entrepreneurs] have each of [the beehives] as a resource but we’re leveraging our collective strengths as a

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NICK WARREN

whole,” says Steven Mauro, vice president of academic administration at Gannon University, of the beehives. “This is something that is really unique and you’re not going to see it anywhere else across the nation.”

In fact, other institutions have been coming to Erie to study the model to see if it can be replicated and scaled in their markets.

“We have people benchmarking this from across the country, coming here to see how we’re doing this,” says Amy Bridger, senior director of corporate strategy and external engagement at Penn State Behrend.

But why does it make sense for universities to undertake such an initiative, to concern themselves with business development?

“Educational institutions really are areas where you have a high level of creativity and development of new research and production. Invention goes hand-in-hand with educational institutions,” Mauro says. “We’re well poised to serve as that anchor for business development and entrepreneurial services.”

That, too, goes for the benefits the beehives bring current and prospective students at any one of these four universities.

“This is a really great way to answer the question that is being asked on a national level of the relevance and the answer of higher education and how we match the skills needed for businesses to the education component of the student we produce,” Bridger says.

And the beehives give the students the ability to work across campuses.

“An advisee of mine is involved at Gannon,” Peyronel says. “Another

Penn State Behrend hosted the first hive at its Innovation Commons idea lab, which has lent its 3D printing, product design, and CAD assistance capabilities to over 50 business projects.

student I have in class is working at Mercyhurst. A lot of people might’ve thought they wouldn’t see that, but it’s working well.”

“If you come in as a business major, you think ‘I’m going to receive a great education,’ but what you might not always think of is: ‘I’m going to have an opportunity to start a business, or be hired to work with a small business directly,’” Mauro adds. “What this means for the student is they get a fantastic opportunity to be thinking entrepreneurially and get great hands-on experiences.”

So far, the beehives have effectively created the buzz around Erie’s entrepreneurial climate and four student bodies. And it’s garnering attention as an example of something that’s working in a Rust Belt region that’s working through the shift in its manufacturing climate. Peyronel notes that the beehives are “an important force for the re-branding of Erie.”

“Success” of the Beehive Network into the future, says Wood, is the “foundation infrastructure to turn us into what I would call a true startup community where people of Erie County have the resources they need to fulfill that innovative spirit: that’s the ultimate goal. Startup friendly, startup successful.”

Ben Speggen can be contacted at bSpeggen@ErieReader.com, and you can follow him on Twitter @BenSpeggen

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Testing the water

Efforts to Hold Erie Coke Accountable recall Lake Erie’s polluted past



This photo, taken on the evening of March 18, shows a steamy mist rising from the surface of the water at the point where Erie Coke's NPDES-permitted discharge of cooling water enters Lake Erie at the mouth of a small stream.

gist and Mercyhurst University professor Mike Campbell.

Over the last three years (2017-19), undergraduate Mercyhurst University student Emma Mader and professor Campbell analyzed possible causes of winter die-offs of gizzard shad (*Dorosoma cepedianum*) they'd observed at the East Ave. Boat Launch, where Erie Coke discharges heated water into Lake Erie.

Their investigation initially revealed no evidence of disease-causing parasites, nor of circumstances consistent with oxygen depletion from ice cover. The dead and dying fish they were finding this winter showed numerous symptoms of disease, and fish collected at the site on March 19 are currently being tested by a fish pathologist with the Fish & Wildlife Service.

Their investigations in 2017 and 2018 led Mader and Campbell to “suspect that the fish were attracted to the site in winter by warm water released from Erie Coke, and that thermal shock was probably a primary cause of death.” They conceded, though, that “it is possible that chemical contaminants released by Erie Coke and entering the lake through groundwater may exacerbate the situation.”

Mader and Campbell emphasize that “the occurrence of groundwater pollution entering Lake Erie from Erie Coke has not been verified,” so additional re-

search is warranted.

Such research could provide answers that we have the right to require, just as our predecessors did in the '70s. And with funding to protect our Great Lakes back on the chopping block, it's especially critical to let our DEP know that we demand Erie Coke's compliance with regulations that protect our public health. (See sidebar for contact details.)

“Erie has forgotten what it used to be like back in the '70s,” explains Anne Helms, a graduate student in the Environmental Science and Engineering Program at Gannon University, via email.

Helms shared with me an alarming environmental study done of Presque Isle Bay by Betz Engineering in 1975 at the direction of the EPA. Its contents are beyond the scope of this article., but suffice it to say, Helms accurately characterizes the study as “a grim reminder of how bad it really was.”

“At one time the Hammermill discharge was blamed for all the problems in the outer harbor,” she adds. “But today, Erie Coke is the only manufacturing plant discharging warm water to that part of the lake. They’re the only factory that is consistently a source of particulate matter/VOC (volatile organic compound) deposition in that area, and the only factory that has a large unlined open pit at the level of the water table that is possibly full of volatile organic compounds.” Groundwater beneath Erie Coke likely makes its way to nearby streams and then Lake Erie.

In the March issue of *National Geo-*

By: Katie Chriest

In 2017, I clumsily completed the Presque Isle Partnership's final Bay Swim. It wasn't pretty — lots of gulping and doggy-paddling — but eventually, I emerged (after nearly everyone else) and rinsed the seaweed from my skin.

I didn't think about what else I was rinsing off; what else I may have ingested.

Most of us wouldn't. We take clean water for granted. Here on Lake Erie, we can be especially laissez-faire, even when we learn of droughts or pollution elsewhere. Surely, we'll always have clean water to drink, a clean bay for play, and clean fish to catch and grill on a summer evening.

It seems inconceivable that we could

still allow our water to be compromised, after all we've learned from a once un-swimmable bay and nearby burning river.

Hold Erie Coke Accountable (HECA) is working to keep us informed and empowered in securing basic rights to clean air and water for everyone in Erie, and to strengthen Erie's image as a great place for business.

At East Middle School on April 16, from 6:30 to 8 p.m., HECA is hosting a community educational event, which will explore the various environmental impacts of Erie Coke's operations. Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP) will be on hand to present information on air pollutants, health effects, the permitting process, and ways to get involved. (See sidebar for details.)

One presenter will be aquatic biolo-

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This photo, taken March 18, depicts one of several dead or dying fish that shows evidence of blood diffusing from its skin to the surface of its head and body. Several of the live fish swarming at the mouth of the stream had visible raised lesions on their skin.

MIKE CAMPBELL

graphic, Rhea Suh, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council, reminds us that the Clean Water Act of 1972 and the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1972 both passed during “a time when smog choked our cities and rivers were so contaminated, they regularly caught fire.”

“Some of us now don’t worry about the toxicity of the air for our children’s afternoon soccer games or the flammability of the local river, primarily because our environmental protections have worked,” Suh adds. “But in far too many places around the country, those

Erie’s Future,” on Feb. 4, the DEP “issued an administrative order to Erie Coke to address ongoing violations of the Pennsylvania Air Pollution Control Act at Erie Coke’s coke production facility in the City of Erie,” according to the DEP website, where a copy of that order is available.

Erie Coke appealed the order on March 6, arguing that it is “vague, unreasonable, arbitrary and capricious, and constitutes an abuse of the PADEP’s discretion.”

I reached Rachel Filippini, executive director of GASP, by email to comment

on this appeal.

“Erie Coke is acting as if they are surprised by DEP’s order when, in fact, DEP met with them back in November about numerous violations,” clarifies Filippini. She adds that in the order, DEP states that it sent Erie Coke a letter in November 2018 detailing the violations and requesting a plan and schedule for addressing them. In December 2018 Erie Coke provided DEP with a general outline of compliance but no schedule for implementation.

In this high-stakes time, while DEP is evaluating Erie Coke’s operating permit, it’s never been more important to contact our DEP; to overcome our cynicism that nothing will change — that our comments will fall on deaf ears.

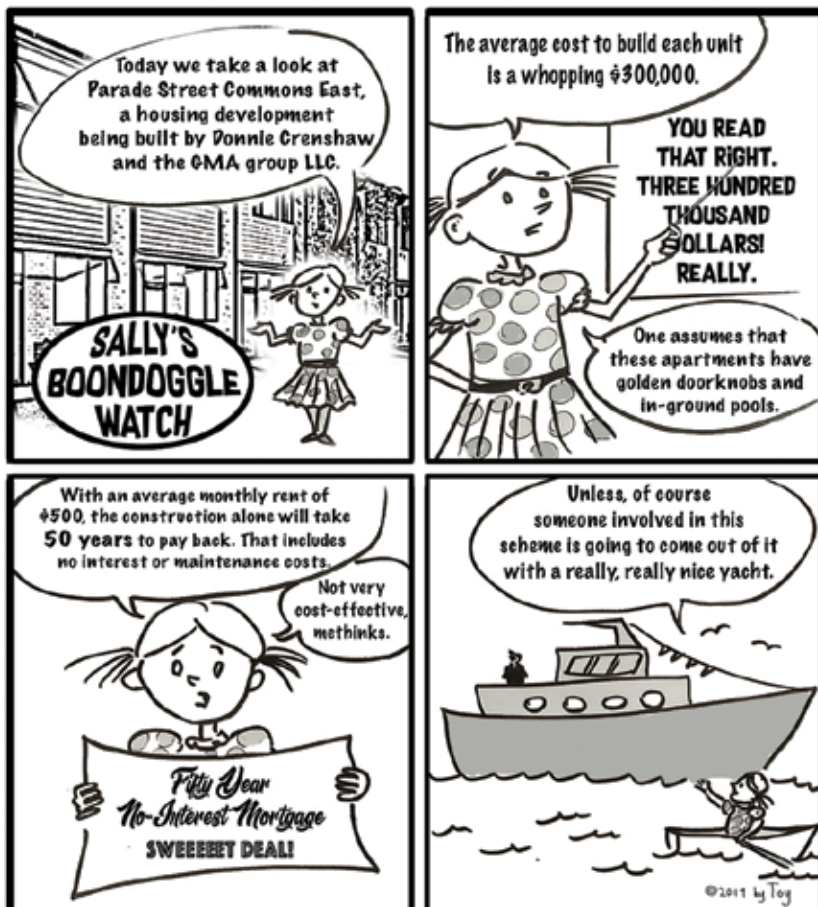
“Citizens play a critical role in holding polluters accountable,” says Filippini. “From reporting foul odors, to writing letters to the editor, to testifying at public meetings — it is imperative that regulators, legislators, and the industry itself hear from those most impacted by emissions from Erie Coke.”

Katie Chriest can be reached at Katie@eriereader.com.

How You Can Help

- Visit the Hold Erie Coke Accountable (HECA) website and follow their Facebook page.
- Attend the April 16 community educational event at East Middle School from 6:30 to 8 p.m., hosted by HECA with Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP). Learn how to get involved.
- Submit a testimonial on HECA’s Submit Media page.
- Report odors or colored plumes of smoke coming from the Erie Coke facility at the foot of East Ave. to DEP’s Northwest Service Representative Kim Yeakle: (814) 332-6839 or kyeakle@pa.gov; or by calling the DEP toll-free at 1-866-255-5158; or report incidents directly to the DEP via their complaint page.
- Ask the DEP to provide more air quality monitors and demand additional research.
- Stay tuned for more information in upcoming issues of the Reader. — KC

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Making Strides

The latest from three 40 Under 40 alumni

By: Cara Suppa

The Erie Reader is always wowed by what its past 40 Under 40 recipients go on to achieve after they have been recognized for their hard work in their professional, personal, and community spheres. We decided to catch up with three of our past recipients who have been helping to shape the community's professional and cultural landscape here in Erie: Courtney Steding (2014), Gisele Littrell (2017), and Matt Wiertel (2018).

Courtney Steding, Director of Career Services at Penn State Behrend



JESSICA HUNTER

Cara Suppa: What have you been up to since your inclusion in the 40 Under 40 Class of 2014?

Courtney Steding: In late 2014, I was promoted to the Director of Career Services, which has allowed me to continue developing relationships with our employers (both on a local and national level) and career coaching, while taking on leadership and supervisory responsibilities for the office.

I went back to school and completed a Master's Certificate in Organization Development and Change through Penn State, and also recently became a Gallup Certified Strengths Coach. In the community, I have been able to build a greater connection within Erie by giving back. The Athena Circle of Trust (of which I was a co-founder) is launching its third cohort of female leaders in 2019. I have also become actively involved in Erie Women's Fund (collective philanthropy that empowers women and families in Erie), serving as the Membership Chair and on the Steering Committee.

CSup: Through the work that you do, you must be widely exposed to the job/career market here in Erie, particular-

ly that which relates to young adults. Are there any trends currently? Any pitfalls? Where do you see the greatest need for employees in the future?

CS: Erie employers are recognizing the need to engage with students earlier in their career (which means while they are in school) in order to build a pipeline of talent. At Behrend, we partner with companies on a variety of levels, which encourages students to get hands-on experience within industry prior to graduation.

No matter the industry, the most competitive students have a combination of internship and/or research experience, leadership positions within student organizations, and are not fearful of becoming a change agent. Finishing college with a degree and good grades is a start, but to be competitive in any business, employers expect graduates to have experience, along with career competencies including problem-solving and critical thinking skills, work ethic, and the ability to communicate with diverse constituents.

CSup: In your position at PSB, are you able to connect, say, college-age entrepreneurs (or those recently graduated) who want to start their own businesses with helpful resources in the Erie community?

CS: By now, we have likely all heard that many of the jobs that will be available in the next 30 years have yet to be created. The pace of the changing workforce and creation of new jobs and businesses require that individuals learn in the moment and be able to problem-solve and improvise. Behrend fosters an open-lab learning experience that allows students to connect with diverse industries throughout the region, which sparks learning and growth beyond the traditional classroom.

For example, a college student or any community member who is seeking entrepreneurial support is able to engage with Innovation Commons at Behrend, in addition to the other Innovation Beehive sites throughout the Erie region. Depending on the individual and their entrepreneurial goal, they may be able to utilize resources from Ben Franklin Technology Partners, Erie Innovation District, or our Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership, just to name a few.

Gisele Littrell, Owner of the Topsy Bean, Moxie Investments and Strongman Services



JESSICA HUNTER

Cara Suppa: Your 40 Under feature is chock-full of professional endeavors. Are you still doing all of it, plus the Topsy Bean now, too?

Gisele Littrell: I sold French Maids a little over a year ago, so that way I could focus on getting started with the cafe. I am still operating Moxie Investments, as well as Strongman Services, and both of those businesses are going strong.

CS: Now let's talk about the Topsy Bean specifically. What is the background on you opening this? Where did the concept come from?

GL: I had attempted to open a cafe several different times over the last 15 years. This is something I had been researching for a long time while I was invested in other businesses. But timing and opportunity just have to match at the moment that something is meant to come to fruition. The timing was right for me, I had a buyer for French Maids, my tenant moved out, and I decided it was the right time to utilize the building, because I own the building, here and next door. So I decided the opportunity was presenting itself for me to finally start working on this long-term dream that I've had.

The passion for coffee just started from "I absolutely love coffee!" I love the process, the countries, the intricacies that are involved from growing to distribution to actual implementation and brewing.

About eight years ago when I went to Europe, I got to visit so many cafes. That passion was stoked to try and start bringing some of that international inspiration here.

CS: What are the day-to-day challenges of owning The Topsy Bean? Are there

any overarching challenges with being a small business owner in Erie?

GL: Day-to-day challenges are learning industry specifics. There are many industry specific nuances that a cafe and restaurant and a cocktail bar entail. This is the type of business that you can't sit on something for a month; I have to make daily and weekly adjustments.

The biggest issue which I know the city is starting to work on is alternative funding for small businesses, particularly in the restaurant industry. And there's a lot of downtown redevelopment going on, which our area [Independence Hill] — even though we're in the city limits — isn't really receiving a lot of those benefits from the partnerships and developments that are occurring right now.

Matt Wiertel, Director of Sales and Marketing at Velocity Network



MAITHAM BASHA-AGHA

Cara Suppa: So you're part of the latest class of recipients, which means less than a year has gone by since you were interviewed. Even still, in that short amount of time, can you describe the growth VNET has seen in this area?

Matt Wiertel: This past year has been incredible and an exciting year for all of us at VNET with the relocation of our corporate offices to Downtown Erie. Our new facility has been in the works for many years and the team worked thousands of hours to complete this amazing space that enables us to provide the highest level of support to our clients. In addition, we now have a unified space to grow our team and also provide world class technology support and training opportunities to our client base. We are thankful for the support from the entire community during the project and are glad to be part of Downtown Erie's rebirth.

CS: The new VNET building, on an aes-

FEATURE

thetic level, is such a cool piece of architecture for our city to have, but its real benefit lies in its functionality. Can you speak a little to the significance of your new headquarters?

MW: The relocation to our new office starts the next chapter in our company's nearly 30-year history. Since the facility was designed with a blank canvas, we were able to design the building to meet the current needs of our clients and staff but also have the ability to grow as the industry changes over time. We have deployed many technologies in the building including intelligent LED Power over Ethernet (PoE) Lighting, the region's first commercially available Tier II Datacenter, and next generation collaboration solutions from Cisco Webex.

CS: What is your opinion on the state of small/locally-owned/independent business and the under-40 crowd here in Erie?

MW: I feel that there is a new spirit of optimism in the local business community with the partnerships being formed with the Erie Innovation District, EDDC, and the Erie Regional Chamber. For the first time in my life-

time as an Erie resident, it seems that all organizations are working towards a common goal to move the community forward and the business community is taking a lead role in that effort.

And finally, we at the Reader love to ask these movers and shakers, "What is your favorite small/locally-owned business in Erie?"

CS: Since opening in December 2017, Ember+Forge has provided a great space to meet with local contacts, while providing the essential fuel (delicious coffee) to discuss new ideas.

GL: Oh no, I can't pick just one! Let me group it in areas — I am the biggest small business supporter in Erie! I would have to say here, in the Hill District; the Colony Plaza with their resurgence and relevance; and State Street — all the restaurants and cafes and markets.

MW: That's a tough question as there are so many. As a fan of donuts, I would have to say Mighty Fine is my favorite local business.

Cara Suppa can be reached at csuppa@eriereader.com

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The Bloom of Local Business

Erie's surprising garden of enterprise

By: Erie Reader staff

A diverse local economy begins with a diversity of local businesses. In order to be competitive in the future, Erie must present itself as a city where anything can happen for anyone — a place where the seeds of enterprise can germinate and grow. Spring is in the air as our annual Industry, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship issue drops, and with it we showcase the impressive array of business varietals that have sprouted up within our community. As their roots spread and take hold, it is our hope that they make Erie perennially a place to work, live, and stay.

Advanced Finishing



NICK WARREN

Disney. General Electric. Mitsubishi. Westinghouse. Kawasaki. Target.

These are just a few of the companies that Advanced Finishing U.S.A., located in Fairview, PA, has served as customers. The business was founded by an engineer named Walter J. Yahn in 1970 when he anticipated that there would be significant growth in powder coating and finishing throughout the region and beyond.

Walt started the company on West 12th Street with little more than a pizza oven and used equipment. Before long, this side project became a flourishing enterprise and he was able to upgrade from the pizza oven to, eventually, an 80,000 square foot plant with over 40 employees. He was an early adopter of the total quality management model — emphasizing not merely production, but continual improvement — and always stressed “customer focus, quality, and service.”

The unique powder coating process, which coats materials with a non-toxic and fireproof plastic powder, is thicker and sturdier than paint — and widely sought-after due the customizability of designs as well as its durability.

Today, the company is still family-owned, with Greg Yahn serving as president and Jeff Swanson as general manager. Advanced Finishing is also now the parent company of another, Archi-Tecture Finishing, which was founded in 2005 by Greg and Heather Yahn. It concen-

trates on a slightly different process that allows for the transfer of high-resolution images onto its finishes or even utilizing realistic patterns such as various woods, marbles, and granites.

From picnic tables and doors to lacrosse sticks and murals, powder coating gets more advanced and impressive with each passing decade and we continue to have one of its industry's leaders right here in Erie County — something which would certainly make Walt Yahn proud. — Jonathan Burdick

FishUSA



NICK WARREN

In 1994, when the World Wide Web was still in its infancy, Dan Pastore launched ErieNet, Inc., the region's first public Internet service provider. By 1998, Pastore was looking for a way to turn another passion and hobby of his — angling — into something more, so he founded FishErie.com as a popular local website and message forum created for anglers. He sold off ErieNet soon after and then co-founded FishUSA, which was one of the first Internet retailers selling fishing tackle.

“The original vision for FishUSA remains the same as it is today: to be based in Erie and to be the nation's leading e-commerce retailer of fishing tackle,” Pastore says. From their humble beginnings and still today as an internationally-known company, their emphasis has been “outstanding customer service and a complete and comprehensive selection of fishing tackle and accessories for all anglers.”

Erie's proximity to the Great Lakes also makes FishUSA's location a natural fit.

“Erie boasts one of the best fisheries in the world,” Emily Whitaker, FishUSA's director of marketing, says. “We have a strong commercial and sport fishing history which has become ingrained in Erie's culture.”

Lake Erie, often called the “Walleye Capital of the World,” can be fished all year (ice fishing is particularly popular on Presque Isle Bay during winter months) and there are a significant variety of freshwater fish to catch, including bass, steelhead, perch, crappie, trout, panfish, pike, and musky.

Over its two decades as “America's Tackle Shop,” Fi-

shUSA has done most of its sales online, but they also have a Pro Shop on West Ridge Road and a brand-new 1,100 square foot Kayak Fishing Outpost. Their product specialists and customer service employees are all zealous anglers themselves.

“We employ a staff of enthusiastic anglers, along with a Pro Staff comprised of industry veterans,” Whitaker explains. She notes two of their employees: Captain Pete Alex, who has run charters for three decades and is a member of a pro team, and Chad Hoover, founder of the Kayak Bass Fishing tournament who is also a celebrity within the online fishing world, with each of his videos posted on social media accumulating thousands of views.

“We're a local company with a national presence,” Pastore concludes, “and that's extremely important these days.”

Time to go get that fishing license. — Jonathan Burdick

Girl6



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Today, a local entrepreneur is leading the beauty charge through her boutique store known as Girl 6, which caters to the needs of African-American women by offering specialty hair and beauty supplies.

A mother of five, a graduate of Mercyhurst University, and a veteran of the Air Force, Autumn Hicks saw a need and acted upon it. “I always wanted to have my own beauty supply shop. The ones in town don't cater fully to the needs of the African-American community — and I wanted to offer a place that would not only provide better products, but also the educational tools to use them.”

Hicks opened her shop in October 2017, after over 24 months of planning.

“There were constant hurdles for me. I had a great credit score and a solid business plan, yet I talked to several banks but none of them would get back to me.” And of those that she did talk to, most didn't un-

derstand her product. “A lot of bankers would ask how a beauty supply store would be profitable. It’s a niche market and it’s tough to sell to those that don’t understand it — that have no connection with ethnic hair, or use beauty supplies.” She then opted to go to the Small Business Administration website and came across a micro-loan program through Bridgeway Capital. “TJ King was exceptionally helpful. He recommended I talk to the SBDC [Small Business Development Center] to get help with my financials.” The SBDC helped Hicks tweak her plan and provided insight about many things she wouldn’t have known to plan for. “You don’t know what you don’t know.”

As for the name? “I was going through a difficult time in my life and my mother, who was my constant champion and supporter, told me to start writing little notes to myself.” Hicks told her mom she was going to give it her namesake, “and my mom didn’t love it. She told me to use the stuff I write every day and come up with something. That night I went home and was thinking about how to bring those affirmations together and flipped to a movie called *Girl 6*.” *Girl 6* is a thriller directed by Spike Lee about a young, innocent struggling actress. “The lead character wore different wigs to constantly change her look. Her character was continually striving for something better. So the name stuck with me.”

She recently purchased a storefront. “Prior to that, we were renting. It’s in the process of getting renovated and we will reopen hopefully this summer.” Her new home base will be located at 820 East Avenue.

She also knows the commitment that goes into owning a business. “The month I opened I found out I was pregnant and then my mother was diagnosed with cancer. But you have to continue to get up and go to work every day.” Her mother passed in May of last year. “That was something in itself. She was my biggest cheerleader. She was also the one that told me to keep going — she didn’t want me sitting around taking care of her all the time.” — Rebecca Styn

Lake Erie Rubber

For one Northwest Pennsylvania manufacturer and its young owner, Erie County definitely fit the mold.

Lake Erie Rubber is the successor to Scully Enterprises, which was comprised of a custom rubber molding and manufacturing center, sales office, and holding company at 6410 West Ridge Road in Fairview Township.



NICK WARREN

Jon Meighan, a native of Syracuse, N.Y. and former GE mechanical engineer in his early 30s, purchased Scully at a cost of \$1.95 million in 2017 with assistance from the Erie County Redevelopment Authority and Decision Associates. Meighan was adamant about sticking around in Erie, with employees who had already sprung for the job and the ability to stretch his investment dollars further.

Flexibility, of course, is one of rubber’s major selling points. Natural rubber is derived from the milky latex sap of the tropical rubber tree and is an example of an elastomer, a material containing a jumble of long-chain polymer molecules that prefer entanglement. When pulled on, the molecules straighten out, but revert to their disordered idea of normalcy as soon as they are let go. The indigenous people of Central and South America rolled the latex sap into balls for their fun and games, but later European colonizers were eager to play with it in a number of more practical contexts.

As far as Lake Erie Rubber is concerned, customers are welcome to bounce their ideas around — request a quote and their team will work with the design guidelines you provide. Rubber is intrinsically strong, durable, flexible, abrasion-resistant, and waterproof and serves a vast array of applications. Today, a number of synthetic elastomers (imitation rubbers that are petroleum or natural gas byproducts) are available and optimized for virtually any use. Want to keep dry outside? Take cover under a sheet of ethylene propylene diene monomer (say that ten times fast). Preparing food or for major

surgery? Silicone should assuage your concerns. Tying with the need for something more colorful? Try poly-isoprene (speaking of which, the company’s own One Leg Up! rubber chew toys, developed in tandem with the Northwest Pennsylvania Innovation Beehive Network, are available online and will soon debut in a pet store near you).

Their facility is capable of the injection, compression, and transfer molding, as well as extrusion processes (for a detailed description of these, visit their website at lakeerierubber.com) — all of which can transform an otherwise nondescript uncured strip of rubber into a host of customized parts. Currently, most of these parts are being sold to the transportation industry, but the recreational vehicle and agriculture industries are on the company’s radar. Most of the company’s clientele is within a 12-hour drive from Erie, so the dried latex hasn’t dribbled too far from the tree yet, but the bottom line is it’s outside money coming in — in other words, purchasing power.

Inject more of that into our workforce and Erie should have no problem snapping back into shape. — Matt Swanseger

Logistics Plus

One of the unsung heroes of Erie’s entrepreneurial ecosystem is the ever-growing Logistics Plus, Inc. — a company that provides freight transportation, warehousing, logistics, and supply chain management solutions to customers all over the globe.

Logistics Plus (LP) was founded over two decades ago in 1996 with only three employees.

It was a true “build it and they will come,” operation, founder and CEO Jim Berlin tells me. “We are a small Erie company and yet our customer base is super marquee — giant companies just continue to find us.” And they just take it as it comes.

While Berlin may be perceived as slightly unconventional, there’s something to be said for one who jumps in feet-first. As an example, there’s no organizational chart in the company. “I had a guy ask to see the organizational chart a little while ago. When I explained I didn’t have one, he said, ‘How do you know who to go to?’” I told him, “Whoever can solve the problem.”

As a society, we operate too often in silos with top-down management where decisions and disagreements flow upward. This presupposes that everyone



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NICK WARREN

holds only one role. But in an industry that is never static, dynamic, and constantly evolving, I find this resolve refreshing. It highlights self-organization and collaboration — where individuals rely on each other rather than competing for power.

And it's working for them.

Today, the company boasts 450 team members operating in more than 22 countries. The Erie office — which is still (and will remain) home base, houses over 150 members of the team. The company's customers include many Fortune 500 corporations, including the crème de la crème — Amazon and Google. As for new hires, Berlin tells me, "In the last six months alone, we brought on 40 people in Erie."

And they have fun. "We aren't as stodgy as some other organizations might be. We were fun and cool before working at Google was cool."

I ask if he's going to continue to grow. "Absolutely. We have a lot of irons in the fire — and a lot of projects percolating. Recently we started doing work in East Africa. That's somewhere we have never been before. We have expanded a lot into power generation projects, and there is a lot of that to be found in that section of the world."

The best part? He keeps jobs in Erie.

"I love that we get to keep these kids home. They get to have a great career — one that's fun and challenging

and they don't have to leave Erie to find a cool job."

When starting a business, conditions will never be perfect, stars will rarely align, and mistakes will often be made. None of those things matter. What matters is how one responds to those moments.

My guess is Jim Berlin and his team at LP take it all in stride. — Rebecca Styn

RokkBoxx



NICK WARREN

Believe it or not, the music video used to be the quintessential pop culture medium. Those of a certain age might remember MTV *Total Request Live* countdowns after school or chuckling along to cheeky captions on VH1's *Pop Up Video*. Gen Xers might recall MTV's debut in 1981 and the five original "VJs" or "video jockeys" guiding viewers through each set.

"Video killed the radio star," it was declared back then — yet 38 years later, it seems more accurate to say that the music video and the VJ have been the ones left for dead. Sure, they still survive on YouTube and Vimeo, but the experience of watching a music video on a TV screen seems somewhat like a novelty in 2019.

The men at Erie Artificial Intelligence (EAI), inventors of the RokkBoxx, are looking to change that. The venture is a collaboration between William Grant, a former sales and marketing representative for several Fortune 500 software companies, and Shawn McCullough, a prominent local DJ (DJ Nitro) with an extensive software development background. Their goal? To team

with bars, restaurants, or wherever music is played to help those businesses provide a more immersive entertainment experience for their customers, getting them to stick around longer and spend more money.

But what is a Rokkboxx? "It's like if MTV had its own cable box," explains Grant. The small appliance houses thousands of music videos and sophisticated algorithms governing how and when to play them, programmed by Nitro. No live band or DJ for the night? Just set the RokkBoxx and forget it. It syncs with an establishment's video system and plays through blocks of anywhere from 200 to 600 music videos, separated into 40 channels of all moods and genres. The content includes everything from today's Top 40 to a Rat Pack station featuring vintage clips from the black-and-white crooner era, niftily edited by DJ Diddles.

RokkBoxx is a VJ in a bottle, baby, and thanks to its intuitive interface, it's been rubbing users the right way. The remote control and on-screen menus are laid out as simply as possible, so the owner or bartender can skip songs or change stations with minimal fidgeting. If connected to the Internet, the box is updated every morning at 4 a.m. and sends its data to the EAI team for analysis. This data is invaluable for ensuring consistently relevant content (what was played the most vs. the least?) and a timely response to any troubleshooting that may arise.

Where the EAI team (currently at seven members) sees the most growth potential is in cross-promotional advertising. Most of EAI's current clients (about 40 between Erie, Meadville, Oil City, Pittsburgh, and Myrtle Beach, S.C.) already take advantage of the on-screen ticker feature and the "Custom" station to run in-house promotions (in place of a video every few songs; the audio continues to play). However, with the new RokkBoxx Media service tier, venues can subscribe at a discount in exchange for loaning their screen space to outside advertisers. Using this model, EAI hopes to expand RokkBoxx nationally within the next two years.

Until then, the company is focused on building relationships within the community, especially small businesses, who can place ads on the platform for as little as \$15. Standalone Rokk-Bot units can be rented for venues without their own integrated video system. So if you're looking to find the life of the party, you can locate its pulse at the Renaissance Centre in the heart of downtown Erie. — Matt Swanseger



Why Franchise?

How chains link together with the local landscape



SIRANAMWONG

By: Nick Warren

Chain restaurants, for better or worse, are a huge part of the American experience, and in turn, the Erie experience. There's a meme out there that asks a musician "so what's it like going on tour? You must see so many amazing places!" What follows is a bleak quartet of images, including one of a Walmart storefront and another of McDonald's "golden arches." This has become the true landscape of the American highway system in particular, and the familiar names and logos only seem to grow as you reach cities like ours, and the players become increasingly varied as you reach greater populations.

It seems like there's been an ever-present opinion that Erie has too many chains. It's an understandable feeling. Why does it feel that way? Chains do bend over backward to get you to notice them. Taking a glance down a busy street, the signs that "pop" the most tend to be the same, and mostly in red for that matter. Not only are they more ingrained in your memory by the sheer repetitive quantity, but they're systematically designed to do just that.

In 1952, Richard and Maurice McDonald wanted to make their new restaurant in San Bernardino, Calif. more eye-catching, and that catalyzed a series of events that led to a global phenomenon, the world's most profitable eatery, and unfortunately for the brothers, Ray Kroc. Maybe the 2016 film *The Founder*

was right, and it's all really just about the name itself, but Kroc's controversial tactics helped to establish the brand as the global leader over the next few decades.

Now let's set one thing straight, there are chains, and then there are *franchises*. The aforementioned Walmart, for example, is not franchised; every store is run by the same giant corporation. Most franchises, on the other hand, are licensed to another company, or in some cases, an individual. Each franchisee pays regular fees to use another company's name, image, and more. "Franchises are built on the concepts of convenience, location and as much quality as they can produce at a reasonable or low price," explained Dale McBrier, co-owner of Lyndal Enterprises, the company that operates the region's Little Caesar's locations.

Some franchise owners, like McBrier, will own and operate all the locations of a store in a given region. Erie's first McDonald's opened in 1960, and was at the time owned by Albert Covelli. At one time, Covelli Enterprises was the largest franchiser of the restaurant. Today they own none, but they are the largest owner of Panera Bread stores in the world, including all four Erie locations (as well as our O'Charley's and the Millcreek Mall Dairy Queen).

Other franchise owners will run a variety of different brands, most notably exemplified by Erie's Scott Enterprises. Chris N. Scott, vice president of the

Overall, chains are a host of locations which could be run by a single giant corporation (e.g. Walmart), or franchised — licensed to another company, or in some cases, an individual. Each franchisee pays regular fees to use another company's name, image, and more.

company, voiced his take on our region's restaurant landscape. "I would say that opposed to people's *perception*, Erie does not have more franchise restaurants per capita than other cities of similar sizes. People say 'it's only franchises' and that's not correct," Scott noted.

According to citydata.com, he's right. At least as far as one type are concerned, availability of fast food restaurants is just below Pennsylvania's average — 6.48/10,000 vs. 6.72/10,000. For what it's worth, Orlando, Fla. topped the Datafiniti list for most fast food restaurants per capita, with a whopping 20.9 per 10,000 people. Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Buffalo cracked the top 10 with 9.2, 9.3, and 9.7 respectively, lest we be fooled by Florida's tourist outlier. Of the top 20 largest fast food restaurants in North America, Erie has 14.

"Erie is a tertiary — or third-tier — market compared to Los Angeles, Chicago, and so forth," Scott clarified. "These franchises try to penetrate all the markets, and it takes longer for certain franchises to get here than it would in bigger markets because they can also put more units up."

Not all restaurants are fast food, of course, though the vast majority of fast food restaurants *are* chains. Casual dining spots like Applebee's have become one of the main focuses for the Scott family; they own and operate all five locations in Northwest Pennsylvania. The decision of "where" and "what" to open up is one that's given the utmost attention, especially from those lending their name. "When you build an Applebee's for example, they will come in there and do a very exclusive study that says 'the territory of Erie can have up to five franchises,'" Scott explained. "The same thing is done with Marriott, Hilton, and so forth. So basically the amount of franchises in Erie is pretty proportionate to what their corporate strategy is. The franchises have to approve every single location, first of all."

There are certain realities at play when this kind of data is gathered.

"There are also some franchises that Erie would never see," Scott noted. "They would never see a Cheesecake Factory, they would never see a P.F. Chang's, they would never see a Ritz-Carlton, and they would never see a J.W. Marriott. There are certain franchises that would not go here because there's not enough volume and the demographics just would not work." Despite how much the public may voice that they want a given business, the truth is that for some things — it's just not in the cards. Others, however, eventually do pop into Erie. In September of last year, it was announced that a Sonic Drive-In was in the works, to be built at the former Sears Automotive location near the Millcreek Mall. Commercials for the restaurant have been airing on our local television stations for years, after all.

"We get requests every day for that stuff. And interestingly enough, all franchises are obviously different. Some of them are very much easier to work with, and reasonable, and other ones can be more challenging, demanding, and difficult," Scott reasoned.

Christina Vogel went on her own journey when she decided to open up her new business. Vogel got her start at Monical's pizza, a regional chain headquartered in Illinois, working there through grad school. After her husband took a job at Erie Insurance and the couple headed to Erie, she had Monical's conduct a feasibility study to start up a franchise here. Pennsylvania was too far away, the company decided. There were, and are, no stores in all of Ohio. But one small Ohio chain not only seemed feasible, but was also eager to work with Vogel to start an Erie location. Donato's Pizza was founded in Columbus, and though it was owned by McDonald's between 1999 and 2003, it was sold back to the original founder and his daughter. "I really like their focus on community, being an involved part of the community," Vogel admitted.

To someone wanting to open their own business, starting their own franchise carries a lot of benefits. "You're buying an established business that has a track record," wagered Scott.

"By virtue of being tried and tested all over the country, franchises work out the bugs and streamline into efficiency machines. That's what we like



NICK WARREN

Erie plays host to 14 of the 20 largest fast food restaurant franchises, including Taco Bell and McDonald's, with Peach Street locations pictured here.

Businesses large and small know that community involvement is important to a business' success, especially with the growing proclivity for supporting local businesses. Erie, in particular, seems to hold their locally-run businesses in high regard. "It's more fierce a protection of their own," Vogel articulated. "I feel that 'buy local' isn't as much in the vocabulary of Central Illinois as it is here."

Local franchises around the city host multitudes of community-based events. From the regular live, local music at Dickey's Barbecue, to fundraisers hosted by Blaze Pizza or Buffalo Wild Wings, these places are getting involved with the city around them, and seem eager to do so.

Pointing out their efforts with the MS Walk, the YWCA, the Erie City Mission, the Blue Coats, and the Benedictines, McBrier concluded that these efforts are "not for the advertising, but for the service."

Vogel mentioned Donato's ongoing partnership with The ExpERIENCE Children's Museum, in addition to working with the Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier and other organizations and nonprofits around town.

Scott clarified that "what they don't realize is that usually, it's a local owner, local employees, local people working on the construction of it, local labor, local snowplows — a lot of it's local food." He was quick to note, "I love to see local restaurants succeed, and I wish we had more."

McBrier agreed, saying that "we want everyone to know that Little Caesars, though a franchise, is local. And so is Dickey's BBQ. Except for franchise fees all the money from these operations stays in Erie and circulates."

"We're grounded here, we live here and we want to see this community thrive," Vogel proclaimed. "We want to be considered a part of it because we are part of it."

Nick Warren's first job was at a Taco Bell, as was his latest meal, probably. He can be reached at nick@eriereader.com

about them, and that's what we don't like about them," confessed McBrier. He quickly noted that "even though they are theoretically safer, franchises fail at a large rate all over the country." Scott also pointed out that "when you go into an Applebee's ... they're a national company as everybody knows and the advantage of it is that they have incred-

ible national advertising, they spend hundreds of millions of dollars advertising on the NFL, and network TV, and a local person could never afford that." Vogel agrees, voicing that "I don't have to trip over some things. I don't have to price 85 different vendors." Relieved, she noted that "it does take away some of the frustration of getting started."



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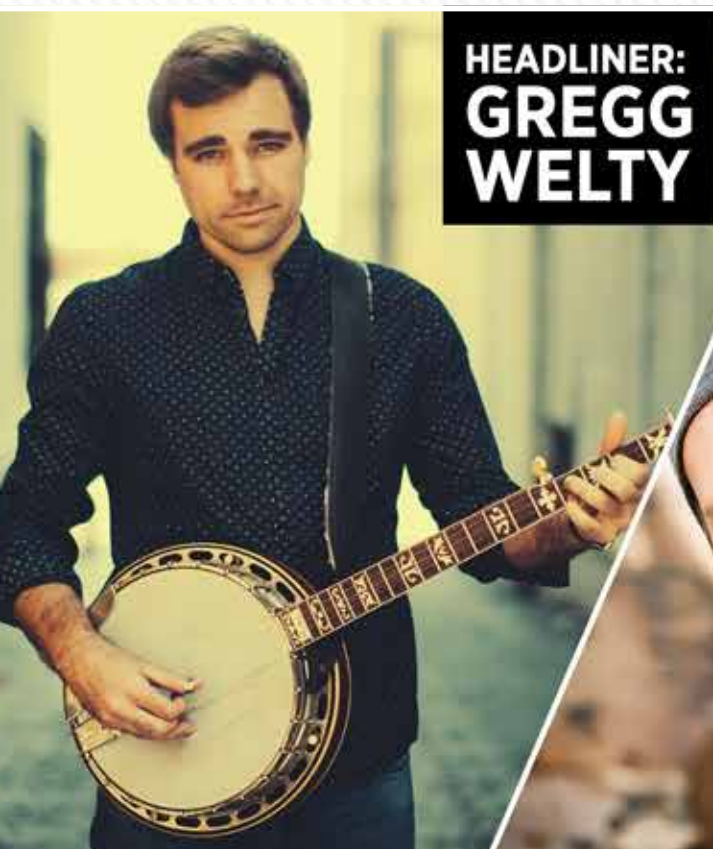
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Mercyhurst Takes Mystery to a Whole New Level



THURSDAY, MAR. 28

If you're looking for a mystery to solve, but then want time to relax and watch as the story unfolds, then you've come to the right whodunit show. Mercyhurst University is ending its theater season with *The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940*, and just as it suggests in the title, there is plenty of comedy — and murder, to go around.

After a disastrous Broadway flop in which three chorus girls were murdered, the creative team behind the unsuccessful-yet-deadly show decides to hold a backer's audition. The Westchester estate where they unwillingly become trapped proves to be as deadly as their first show. Only this time, no one is safe as the "Slasher" strikes again.

Dr. Brett Johnson, who has "been wanting to direct [this show] for several years," describes this production by John Bishop as "hysterically funny but also witty, biting, and refreshingly irreverent."

A show that, much like its content, did make it to Broadway (though it was *not* a flop) and was even directed by the playwright John Bishop himself in 1987.

For Johnson, that was the ultimate takeaway that attracted him to the show. He explains, "My primary consideration when choosing material is finding scripts that will challenge our students and facilitate their growth as artists and scholars. A show like *The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940* challenges them to embrace a broader style of performance than they're accustomed to while still drawing upon the skills they've learned in classes and previous productions."

Besides a disastrously funny plot, this show lends itself to a spectacular set design. "This set is one of the largest and most ornate ones that we've constructed during my six-year tenure at Mercyhurst...replete with 12-foot walls, French doors, chandeliers, revolving bookcases, and other surprises," Johnson informs.

If you leave this show wondering what the stabbing pain in your stomach is, don't fear that you're the "Slasher's" next victim. That ache is from laughing. — Kalli Oberlander

7:30 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays,
2:00 p.m. Sundays through April 7 // Taylor Little Theatre, 501 E 38th St. // \$15, seniors \$10, students/youth \$5 // miac.mercyhurst.edu

The Flick at Dramashop

FRIDAY, MAR. 29

The Flick would probably run about 16 reels long. If you're curious to know what that means, one of the characters might be able to answer that for you. While it may be epic in length, it celebrates the minutiae of everyday life. This story isn't something that's being projected on a screen; it's being performed on the stage. This Pulitzer Prize-winning play is directed by Jessica Annunziata with Alaina Manchester assistant directing. The former has immense respect for the latter, quickly citing that "she's brilliant."

While it's Annunziata's first time directing a full production, she's no stranger to the Dramashop stage, having starred in productions such as *Dorian Grey*, *The Humans*, and *Heisenberg*. Written by Annie Baker (who Dramashop regulars may be familiar with for penning *Circle Mirror Transformation*), the play premiered off-Broadway in 2013. The following year, it won the Pulitzer Prize for Best Drama, notably besting *Fun Home*, which coincidentally will close out this year's season at Dramashop. On its surface, it's the tale of three movie theater employees and the interactions they have working at a New England venue with one of the last working 35mm projectors. While it was widely praised, it also drew a fair deal of criticism for its running length, coming in at around three hours. Annunziata explains that "the text of the play itself is not super long, but it is written in a way that it incorporates the natural pauses in any interaction and fully embraces them." Celebrating naturalistic interactions, and metered comedy, Annunziata notes that "it's a tricky device, but we have a great team of incredibly talented people who are committed to telling this story and celebrating its nuance."

One of those people is Zach Flock, who plays Sam, who in Flock's words "is a character who, other than age, I don't have much in common with on the surface." He elaborated, explaining that Sam "feels dissatisfied, with life, with love, with his career and family. I'm sure everyone can relate to one, or more, of those things." The show will be stage managed by Pamela Perron and stars Flock, Pat Washington, Megan Hamm, and Teddy Buchanan. — Nick Warren

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Bel-Aire Clarion, 2800 W. 8th
St. belaireclarion.com.

Musician Mashup

Mar. 27 — 9 p.m.
Scotty's Martini Lounge, 301
German St. facebook.com.

MVP

Mar. 28, Apr. 4 — 5:30
to 8:30 p.m.
Dickey's BBQ Pit, 3716
Liberty St. facebook.com.

Black Widow

Mar. 29 — 5 to 7 p.m.
Churchill's Bourbon &
Brew, 8199 Perry Hwy.
presqueisledowns.com.

Refuge

Mar. 29 — 6 to 10 p.m.
BIGBAR, 14 E. 10th St. bigbar.net.

Riot in the Basement

Mar. 29 — 6 to 11 p.m.
Basement Transmissions, 145
W. 11th St. facebook.com.

Paul Hunter

Mar. 29 — 7 to 9 p.m.
Churchill's Bourbon &
Brew, 8199 Perry Hwy.
presqueisledowns.com.

Slaughter in the Meridian,
Brotherhood of the
Jam, Within the Scars

Mar. 29 — 10 p.m. to 1 a.m.
Scotty's Martini Lounge, 301
German St. facebook.com.

The Quasi Kings

Mar. 29 — 10 p.m.
Five-piece reggae band from
Columbus, Ohio rocks at
the Rook for free show.
Kings Rook Club, 1921
Peach St. facebook.com.

The Acoustic Jukebox

Mar. 30 — 5 to 7 p.m.
Churchill's Bourbon &
Brew, 8199 Perry Hwy.
presqueisledowns.com.

Rick Magee & The
Roadhouse Rockers

Mar. 30 — 6 to 10 p.m.
BIGBAR, 14 E. 10th St. bigbar.net.

Indigo

Mar. 30 — 7 p.m.
Tippy Bean, 2425 Peach
St. facebook.com.

Brown Dog

Mar. 30 — 7 to 9 p.m.
Churchill's Bourbon &
Brew, 8199 Perry Hwy.
presqueisledowns.com.

Boys of Fall w Real
Fake Doors

Mar. 30 — 7:30 p.m.
The Ballet Haus, 1020 Hol-
land St. facebook.com.

RootsCollider w Rizm &
Common Denominator

Mar. 30 — 10 p.m.
Drum and bass electro-rock
rumbles at the Rook with Rizm
and Common Denominator.
Kings Rook Club, 1921
Peach St. facebook.com.

Gem City Revival

Mar. 31 — 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
The Skunk & Goat Tavern, 17 W.
Main St., North East, PA 16428
skunkandgoattavern.com.

Two Kings

Mar. 31 — 1 to 4 p.m.
Arundel Cellars & Brewing,
11727 E. Main St., North East,
PA 16428 arundelcellars.com.

Dan Schall

Mar. 31 — 7 p.m.
Phillipsville United Meth-
odist Church, 11469 Phil-
lipsville Rd., Wattsburg, PA
16442 DanSchall.org.

Mom Jeans, Mover Shaker,
Prince Daddy & The Hyena

Apr. 1 — 7:30 to 11 p.m.
The Ballet Haus, 1020 Hol-
land St. facebook.com.

Blues Jam and Open Mic

Apr. 2 — 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Dickey's BBQ Pit, 3716
Liberty St. facebook.com.

Concert of Soloists

Apr. 3 — 8 p.m.
St. Luke's RC Church, 421 E.
38th St. miac.mercyhurst.edu.

Brian K. Chase

Apr. 4 — 6 to 9 p.m.
The Skunk & Goat Tavern, 17 W.
Main St., North East, PA 16428
skunkandgoattavern.com.

PigPen Theatre Co.

Apr. 4 — 7:30 p.m.
Walker Recital Hall, 501 E. 38th
St. miac.mercyhurst.edu.

Wrists, Marsh Sound,
onewayness v. Cee
Brown, Stclvr

Apr. 4 — 8 to 11 p.m.
Erie Movie House, 3424 W.
Lake Rd. facebook.com.

Malpractice

Apr. 5 — 6 to 10 p.m.
BIGBAR, 14 E. 10th St. bigbar.net.

Tropidelic

Apr. 5 — 8 p.m.
Kings Rook Club, 1921
Peach St. facebook.com.

Hard Luck Story, Detroit
Red, Paper Matches

Apr. 5 — 10 p.m.
Scotty's Martini Lounge, 301
German St. facebook.com.

Six Year Stretch

Apr. 6 — 6 to 10 p.m.
BIGBAR, 14 E. 10th St. bigbar.net.

Paoello & Gone

Apr. 6 — 8 p.m.
Room 33, 1033 State
St. facebook.com.

Stephen Trohoske,
Soundtrack of a Daydream

Apr. 6 — 8 p.m.
Artlore Studio, 3406 W.
Lake Rd. facebook.com.

Bound by Fate, Storms
Within, Within the Scars

Apr. 6 — 9:30 p.m.
Scotty's Martini Lounge, 301
German St. facebook.com.

Jivviden

Apr. 6 — 10 p.m.
Cleveland-based band creates

TUESDAY SESSIONS

1st TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH
5:30-7:30 PM
Blues Jam & Open Mic
Lead by
PAOLELLO & GONE

2nd TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH
5:30-7:30 PM
Disney Sing Along Night
Lead by
BROOKE SURGNER

3rd TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH
5:30-7:30 PM
Showtune Singer's Night
Bring Your Own Sheet Music
Lead by JIM MADDEN

4th TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH
5:30-7:30 PM
Ukulele Workshop
Lead by
ETHAN HOWELL





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March 27, 2019

Experience Eddie Griffin

Star comedian brings it on at the Avalon

SATURDAY, MAR. 30



Comedian Eddie Griffin calls it like he sees it — and while he may at times paint a picture some of us don’t want to see, he does so with the charisma and uncompromising honesty to make us laugh despite ourselves. Hailing from the American Heartland

in Kansas City, Griffin has never been afraid to speak from the heart. “Being real” has served him *real* well throughout a professional career now in its 30th year. After cutting his teeth in the New York City stand-up circuit, Griffin moved to Los Angeles to be nearer his family, subsequently finding work in TV and film. He has been involved in 60-some projects, but he is most noted for his role as motor-mouthed tow truck owner Eddie Sherman in the late ’90s sitcom *Malcolm & Eddie* and as the titular character of the 2002 blaxploitation parody *Undercover Brother*. Most recently he appeared as the pastor who married Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper’s characters in *A Star is Born*.

Stand-up, however, is where Griffin’s star most continues to shine. In between television and film projects, Griffin holds a residency at the SLS Hotel Las Vegas, performing there Monday through Wednesday before taking his show on

the road for the weekends. Erie’s Avalon Hotel & Conference Center is set to be a pit stop on his latest excursion, with a full evening of activities planned surrounding the show. Producer, former manager, and native Erieite Ann Flagella could not be more excited to share this with her hometown. If you haven’t seen him live in the past year, “his entire set is new. To watch comedians everyday, it’s hard to make me laugh. I was literally in tears ... everything hurt when I was done watching his show.” Opening for Griffin is up-and-coming local Kyle Harris, whose meteoric rise has taken him from Erie open mic nights to the Stratosphere (Casino, Hotel, and Tower in Las Vegas) in less than a year. According to Flagella, the bigger stage did not daunt him at all. “There was no fear. When you’re doing exactly what you’re supposed to be doing, you can tell.”

And as far as what you could and should be doing? At minimum, attend the main event from 8 to 10:30 p.m. If you truly want to make a night of it, show up early for the hour-long pre-party with DJ Salt (beatmaker and producer for many of Erie’s best rappers) and/or stay late for the afterparty at Bolero for an additional \$20. Flagella estimates there is a better than 90 percent chance Griffin himself will pop by. Meanwhile, enjoy complimentary appetizers courtesy of Valerio’s, a cash bar, and full bottle service. Star 104’s Kwame Dankwa will play host for the evening. The event is expected to sell out, so be sure to tune in quickly. — Matt Swanseger

7 to 10 p.m. (afterparty immediately following) // 16 W. 10th St. // \$40 general admission, \$80 VIP (preferred seating and afterparty access) // tickettailor.com/events/afproductions

a unique soundscape using elements of folk, traditional rock’n’roll, and blues. Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. facebook.com.

Rick Magee & Jack Adams Apr. 7 — 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The Skunk & Goat Tavern, 17 W. Main St., North East, PA 16428 skunkandgoattavern.com.

OsbornNash Apr. 7 — 1 to 4 p.m. Arundel Cellars & Brewing, 11727 E. Main St., North East, PA 16428 arundelcellars.com.

Rustbelt Record Swap II Apr. 7 — 6 p.m. Scotty’s Martini Lounge, 301 German St. facebook.com.

Pit N Riff feat. Oh, Sleeper Apr. 8 — 6 p.m. Voodoo Brewery will be at Basement Transmissions for metalcore show supported by both Erie and national acts. Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11th St. facebook.com.

The Kassia Ensemble w Mary Elizabeth Bowden Apr. 10 — noon Reed Union Building at Penn St. Behrend, 4701 College Dr. behrend.psu.edu.

Scott Meier Apr. 10 — 8 p.m. Walker Recital Hall, 501 E. 38th St. miac.mercyhurst.edu.

Erie Festival of Dance Mar. 30 Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. eriedanceconsortium.org.

Reflections 4 Apr. 4 — 6 to 8 p.m. Erie Dance Theater, 1603 Cherry St. eriedancetheater.org.

Raw Edges XXI Apr. 5, 6 — 7 p.m. & Apr. 6, 7 — 2 p.m. Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. miac.mercyhurst.edu.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall Apr. 5, 6 — 8 p.m. Dafmark Dance Theater, 1033 State St. dafmarkdance.org.

Champions of Dance Apr. 6 — 10:30 a.m. Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier champi-oncheercentral.com.

Lake Erie National Cheer & Dance Championships Apr. 6, 7 Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. champi-oncheercentral.com.

Social Ballroom, Swing, Latin Dance Apr. 6 — 6:30 to 10 p.m. St. John’s Lutheran Parish Center, 2216 Peach St. usadance.org.

K-Pop Dance Party Apr. 9 — 6 to 7 p.m. Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E.

Front St. events.erielibrary.org.

FOOD & DRINK

Artist Happy Hour Mar. 28 — 5 to 8 p.m. Erie Art Museum, 20 E. 5th St. erieartmuseum.org.

Cooking for Digestive Health Mar. 28 — 5:30 p.m. Whole Foods Co-Op, 1341 W. 26th St. wfcerie.coop.

Fish & Pierogi Dinner Mar. 29 — 4 to 7 p.m. Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School, 1531 E. Grandview Blvd. 814-825-7313

Zem Zem Meat Bingo Mar. 29 — 6 to 10 p.m. Zem Zem Shrine Club, 2525 W. 38th St. zemzem.us.

2019 Home Winemaking Seminar Mar. 30 — 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Luther Memorial Church, 225 W. 10th St. piwine.com.

Rebecca Mae’s Drag Brunch Mar. 31 — 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Erie’s hit drag event returns to Bourbon Barrel, featuring Mae and her monthly group of guests. Bourbon Barrel, 1213 State St. facebook.com.

Mac N Cheese 4 Mar. 31 — 1 to 4 p.m. Bayfront Convention Center,

1 Sassafras Pier eriephil.org. **Food Truck Friday** Apr. 5 — 5 p.m. Luminary Distilling, 8270 Peach St. Ste. 300 facebook.com.

A Royal Night Celebrity Bartending Apr. 5 — 5 to 8 p.m. Bourbon Barrel, 1213 State St. bourbonbarrelerie.com.

Erie Micro Brewfest Apr. 6 — 1 to 4 p.m. or 5 to 8 p.m. The Brewerie at Union Station, 123 W. 14th St. wqln.org.

Maple Festival Apr. 6, 7 Asbury Woods, 4105 Asbury Rd. asburywoods.org.

Smart Snacking Apr. 10 — 6 p.m. Whole Foods Co-Op, 1341 W. 26th St. wfcerie.coop.

MOVIES

A Star is Born Mar. 27 — 6 p.m. For a much requested encore screening, Bourbon Barrel will show Oscar-winning film about a young singer on her way to stardom. Bourbon Barrel, 1213 State St. filmsocietynwpa.org.

Aquaman (2018) Mar. 28 — 8 p.m. Pogue Student Center at Edinboro Univ., 405 Scot-

land Rd., Edinboro, PA 16444 events.edinboro.edu.

Gamera vs. Guiron Mar. 29 — 8 to 11 p.m. Erie Movie House, 3424 W. Lake Rd. facebook.com.

Goodbye Christopher Robin Mar. 31 — 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. events.erielibrary.org.

Can You Ever Forgive Me? Apr. 3 — 6 p.m. Cat lover and biographer (played by Melissa McCarthy) takes drastic steps when she finds herself out of touch and unpublishable. Bourbon Barrel, 1213 State St. filmsocietynwpa.org.

If Beale Street Could Talk Apr. 10 — 6 p.m. Bourbon Barrel, 1213 State St. filmsocietynwpa.org.

Volcanoes: The Fires of Creation Ongoing — 10 a.m., 1 p.m., & 4 p.m. Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. biggreenscreen.com.

Amazon Adventure Ongoing — 11 a.m. & 2 p.m. Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. biggreenscreen.com.

Backyard Wilderness Ongoing — noon & 3 p.m. Tom Ridge Environmental

Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. biggreenscreen.com.

VISUAL ARTS

Back to Nature Easter Baskets Mar. 28 — 7 to 8:30 p.m. Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, 201 E. 10th St. neighborhoodarthouse.org.

Tyanna Buie: Recollections Ongoing through Apr. 1 Erie Art Museum, 20 E. 5th St. erieartmuseum.org.

Annual Student Show Apr. 2 — 7 to 9 p.m. Time listed is for opening reception, through Apr. 9 thereafter. Allegheny Art Gallery, 520 N. Main St. Meadville, PA 16335 sites.allegheny.edu.

2019 Senior Art Thesis Exhibition Opening Apr. 2, ongoing through May 3 Cummings Art Gallery at Mercyhurst, 501 E. 38th St. miac.mercyhurst.edu.

Spring Canvas Classes Apr. 3, 8 — 6 to 8 p.m. Claytopia, 924 W. Plaza Dr. claytopiaerie.com.

Jay & Mona Kang Art Show & Sale Apr. 5 — 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. & Apr. 6, 7 — noon to 3 p.m. & Apr. 8 — 1 to 6 p.m. Barber National Institute, 100

DANCE

Spring Show: Boys of Fall



SATURDAY, MAR. 30

It may officially be spring, but Boys of Fall are coming to Erie to play the second-ever show at the Ballet Haus. Coming from Detroit, Boys of Fall bring a very clean-cut brand of pop-punk/pop-rock to the stage. After breaking up for a short time, they reunited due to fan demand after the posthumous success of their album *Thank You & Goodbye*. This success caught the attention of In-Vogue Records, which led to the 2018 release of the five song EP, *Chasing Lonely*, and the follow up full-length, *Better Moments*, which debuted at No. 7 on the Billboard Alternative New Artist chart in October of 2018. The band released music videos for the album’s two singles, a

fairly standard white-background video for the song “Heartbreaker,” and a more creative and humorous *Revenge of the Nerds*-inspired video for the incredibly catchy song “Bad Company.” Opening for Boys of Fall are Erie’s own Real Fake Doors, who are releasing their debut EP *11th and State*, named after the location of the studio where the band first met. Real Fake Doors released a music video early this month for their single off the EP, “Falling,” a song which stylistically touches on everything from pop-punk, easycore, and good old rock ‘n’ roll. Next on the bill are First to Eleven, an Erie based alternative rock group. First to Eleven take their new music in a much different direction on their latest single “Thrill” than their *Dead to Me* and *Out of Time* EPs, with “Thrill” sounding much more like a top 40 pop song than alt-rock. The band also released two 18-track cover albums last year, and have racked up millions of views on their popular YouTube channel. Taking the opening slot on the bill are another Erie pop-rock band, Lights + Letters, who released their first EP, *Tell Me*, last year. — Tommy Shannon

7:30 p.m. // 1020 Holland St. // \$10 advance, \$13 doors // All Ages, BYOB with ID // facebook.com/boysoffallband

Growing Stronger Through Dance



The 10th Erie Festival of Dance will showcase the work of 18 different choreographers from 18 different dance companies, with nearly 150 dancers performing.

SATURDAY, MAR. 30

Let your mind and body wander — the Erie Dance Consortium is putting on its 10th Biennial Erie Festival of Dance. Erie is a diverse community, and when it seems like people can’t agree or see eye-to-eye on certain issues, art becomes a valuable asset. Creative work often strengthens communities and ultimately brings people together because art allows you to see through a different perspective than your own. Sara Little, treasurer of the Erie Dance Consortium (or EDC for short), explains that their “mission is to promote and celebrate the art, education, performance, and experience of dance, while building participation, appreciation, and audience for all dance forms within the Erie community.” As dance comes in many forms, so does the variety of talented dancers

that showcase their abilities in the Erie Festival of Dance. “We are super excited to have 18 pieces (18 different choreographers, from 18 different companies, nearly 150 dancers) grace the beautiful stage at the Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center. This is certainly an achievement of our progression,” exclaims Little. From master classes to community outreach, the EDC continues to provide dance to anyone interested in the Erie community. Whether you have little to no experience in dance, or you’re a seasoned pro, there’s a spot waiting for you with this all-volunteer organization. If you want to celebrate your weekend properly, why not get creative and learn some new moves? — Kalli Oberlander

7 p.m. to 9 p.m. // Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E 38th St. // \$15, youth, seniors, and students \$12 // eriedanceconsortium.org

Barber Pl. barberinstitute.org.

Gallery Night at Brew Ha Ha
Apr. 6 — 7 to 10 p.m.
Brew Ha Ha at the Colony, 2612 W. 8th St. <http://brewhahacolony.com>.

Michael Kashey: You Got Me in Stitches
Ongoing through Apr. 9
Glass Growers Gallery, 10 E. 5th St. glassgrowersgallery.com.

Laura Gooley & Brian Pardini
Ongoing through Apr. 10
Glass Growers Gallery, 10 E. 5th St. glassgrowersgallery.com.

James McMurray: Faces and Paces
Ongoing through June 10
Erie Art Museum, 20 E. 5th St. erieartmuseum.org.

Bill Brady
Ongoing through Aug. 2019
Erie Art Museum, 20 E. 5th St. erieartmuseum.org.

Brian Pardini
Ongoing through Aug. 2019
Erie Art Museum, 20 E. 5th St. erieartmuseum.org.

THEATER

Shakespeare in Love: The Play
Mar. 27, 28, 29, 30 — 7:30 p.m. & Mar. 31 — 2 p.m.
Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. erieplayhouse.org.

The Addams Family Musical
Mar. 28, 29, 30, Apr. 4, 5, 6 — 7:30 p.m. & Mar. 31, Apr. 7 — 2:30 p.m.
Diebold Performing Arts Center, 218 Meadville St, Edinboro, PA 16412 edinborotheatre.wixsite.com.

Sunset Boulevard
Mar. 29, 30 — 7 p.m. & Mar. 31 — 2 p.m.
Seneca High School, 10770 Wattsburg Rd. showtix4u.com.

Moonlight and Magnolias
Mar. 29, 30, Apr. 5, 6 — 7:30 p.m. & Mar. 31, Apr. 7 — 3 p.m.
All An Act, 652 W. 17th St. allanact.net.

The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940
Mar. 29, 30, Apr. 5, 6 — 7:30 p.m. & Mar. 31, Apr. 7 — 2 p.m.
Taylor Little Theatre at

Mercyhurst U., 501 E. 38th St. miac.mercyhurst.edu.

The Flick
Mar. 29, 30, Apr. 5, 6 — 8 p.m.
Dramashop, 1001 State St. 210dramashop.org.

Getting Mama Married
Mar. 30 — 5:30 p.m. & Mar. 31 — 2:30 p.m.
Station Dinner Theatre, 4940 Peach St. canterburyfeast.com.

Heathers the Musical
Apr. 4, 5, 6 — 7:30 p.m.
Studio Theatre at Penn St. Behrend, 4701 College Dr. behrend.psu.edu.

12 Angry Men (Performed by 12 Impassioned Women)
Apr. 6 — 7:30 p.m.
Meadville Community Theatre, 400 N. Main St., Meadville, PA 16335 mctbackstage.com.

COMEDY

Comic Relief for Caregivers
Mar. 28 — 4 to 8 p.m.
Zem Zem Shrine Club, 2525 W. 38th St. 814-835-7487

Samuel J. Comroe

Mar. 28 — 7 p.m. & Mar. 29, 30 — 6:45 or 9:30 p.m.
Stand-up comedian and current contestant on *America’s Got Talent* adds Jr’s to the over 100 clubs and colleges that he visits annually.
Jr’s Last Laugh, 1402 State St. jrslastlaugh.com.

Bobby Collins
Apr. 4 — 7 p.m. & Apr. 5, 6 — 6:45 or 9:30 p.m.
Clever, truthful and incredibly comedic, Collins comes to Erie for five shows.
Jr’s Last Laugh, 1402 State St. jrslastlaugh.com.

SPORTS

Lund Martial Arts Academy 2019 Break-A-Thon
Mar. 30 — 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Bethel Baptist Church, 1781 W. 38th St. facebook.com.

Erie SeaWolves vs. Trenton Thunder
Apr. 5 — 6:05 p.m. & Apr. 6, 7 — 1:35 p.m.
SeaWolves home

opening series.
UPMC Park, 110 E.10th St. milb.com.

EPIC Volleyball Tournament
Apr. 6
ERIEBANK Sports Park, 8155 Oliver Rd. ovr.org.

A Night at the Races
Apr. 6 — 3 p.m.
St. Boniface Coleman Center, 9367 Wattsburg Rd. 814-602-4344

PA State Bowling Open Championships
Apr. 6, 7
Rolling Meadow Lanes, 3304 Zuck Rd. bowlpa.com.

Erie SeaWolves vs. Altoona Curve
Apr. 8, 9 — 6:05 p.m. & Apr. 10 — 12:05 p.m.
UPMC Park, 110 E.10th St. milb.com.

COMMUNITY

Yoga by the Bay
Mar. 27 — 5:15 to 6:15 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. events.erialibrary.org.

Interview Skills
Mar. 27 — 6 to 7 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. events.erialibrary.org.

Fiber Arts Meetup
Mar. 27 — 6:30 to 8 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. events.erialibrary.org.

Digital Learning Day 2019
Mar. 28 — 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Barber National Institution (Gym), 100 Barber Pl. facebook.com.

Pennwriters Group
Mar. 28 — 1 to 4 p.m. & Apr. 2 — 6 to 7:45 p.m.
Multiple library locations
events.erialibrary.org.

Alzheimer’s Support Group
Mar. 28 — 3 to 4 p.m.
Lincoln Community Center Library, 1255 Manchester Rd. events.erialibrary.org.

Spinechillers: Creature Feature
Mar. 28 — 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. events.erialibrary.org.

Green Screen for Video Projects

CALENDAR

Mom Jeans Moves and Shakes at Erie's Newest Music Venue



MONDAY, APR. 1

California indie rockers Mom Jeans (stylized as Mom Jeans.) are making their way east to Erie for a long-anticipated set at Ballet Haus, the city's freshest venue. Supporting the sad songwriters are Mover Shaker, Price Danny & The Hyena, and Speed Dial (formerly known as PLAZA), a progressive rock band from Buffalo.

This will be Mom Jeans' first show in

Erie, and tickets are selling fast. In 2018 the band released their album *Puppy Love*. So far, songs from this release have not hit the top of their streaming list, but the tracks blend seamlessly with 2016's *Best Buds*, so expect to hear a mix of old and new songs from the band.

Mover Shaker, a Detroit band, bring similar sounds with a slightly more upbeat tone. Prince Danny & The Hyena come to the Haus after a show in Syracuse with the headliners, where they promise to deliver a "sonic soundtrack" channeling the angst of America's mid-20-something.

Just as other shows by Aorta Music & Management Erie have been, this event is BYOB for those over 21 with proper ID, although no hard liquor is allowed at the show. — Hannah McDonald

7:30 p.m. to 11 p.m. // 1020 Holland St.
// All Ages // Pre-sale, \$15; Door, \$17 // [facebook.com](#)

Mar. 28 — 6 to 7:30 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. [events.erieibrary.org](#).

Women's Empowerment Panel 5.0

Mar. 28 — 6 to 8 p.m.
Frank G. Pogue Student Center, 405 Scotland Rd., Edinboro, PA 16444 [events.edinboro.edu](#).

Free Verse Poetry Open Mic

Mar. 28 — 7 p.m.
Tippy Bean, 2425 Peach St. [facebook.com](#).

Pride Weekend at the Peak

Mar. 29, 30, 31
Peek'n Peak Resort, 1405 Olde Rd., Clymer, NY 14724 [pknpk.com](#).

Little Mates Easter Eggs-Travaganza

Mar. 29 — 10 a.m. to noon
Erie Maritime Museum, 150 E. Front St. Ste. 100 [flagshipniagara.org](#).

Hero Academy

Mar. 30 — 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Splash Lagoon Indoor Water Park, 8091 Peach St. [splashlagoon.com](#).

Coloring for Grown-Ups

Mar. 30 — 10 a.m. to noon
Millcreek Branch Library, 2088 Interchange Rd. Ste. 280 [events.erieibrary.org](#).

Get That Grant!

Mar. 30 — 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. [events.erieibrary.org](#).

Love, Light & Healing Psychic Fair

Mar. 30 — 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Healing energy will flow through reiki specialists, astrologists, mediums, tarot readers, crystals, jewelry and more at the 3rd annual spirit-focused event.

Ambassador Banquet & Conference Center, 7794 Peach St. [facebook.com](#).

Pokemon League

Mar. 30 — 2 to 4 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. [events.erieibrary.org](#).

Cathedral Prep-Villa Legacy Gala

Mar. 30 — 5:30 to 11 p.m.
Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafra Pier 814-452-7737 ext. 2293

Gull Point Clean-up

Mar. 31 — 1 p.m.
Gull Point at PI State Park, 1 Peninsula Dr. [trecepi.org](#).

Couples Winter Yoga

Mar. 31 — 4 p.m.
Whole Foods Co-Op, 1341 W. 26th St. [wfcerie.coop](#).

What Is Jr. Jeopardy?

Apr. 1, 8 — 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.
Multiple library locations [events.erieibrary.org](#).

Laser April Fools

Apr. 1 — 6 or 7:30 p.m.
Cooper Science Center, 230 Scotland Rd., Edinboro, PA 16444 [edinboro.edu](#).

Teen Reading Lounge

Apr. 1, 8 — 6 to 7:30 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. [events.erieibrary.org](#).

Monday Makers: Cosplay and Costume Design Workshop

Apr. 1 — 6 to 8 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. [events.erieibrary.org](#).

You Are The One

Apr. 2 — 6 p.m.
Whole Foods Co-Op, 1341 W. 26th St. [wfcerie.coop](#).

The End of the Bronze Age 1200 BCE

Apr. 2 — 7 to 8 p.m.
Yehi Ballroom at Gannon Univ., 124 W. 7th St. [gannon.edu](#).

Gospel Hill Garden Club

Apr. 2 — 7 to 9:30 p.m.
Wesleyville Borough Hall, 3421 Buffalo Rd. 814-899-5982

A Morning with Murray

Apr. 3 — 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.
Millcreek Branch Library, 2088 Interchange Rd. Ste. 280 [events.erieibrary.org](#).

Autism Awareness

Apr. 3 — 1 to 2 p.m.
Iroquois Branch Library, 4212 Iroquois Ave. [events.erieibrary.org](#).

Backyard Beekeeping

Apr. 3 — 7 to 8:30 p.m.
Asbury Woods Nature Center, 4105 Asbury Rd. [registration.asburywoods.org](#).

Gentle Yoga & Meditation: Level 2

Apr. 4 — 10:30 a.m. to noon & Apr. 8 — 6 to 7:45 p.m.
Multiple library locations [events.erieibrary.org](#).

TREC Open House

Apr. 4 — 6 p.m.

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'PigPen' Roots Up Musical Treasures at Mercyhurst



PigPen Theatre Co. will bring their imaginative act north to Mercyhurst's Walker Recital Hall from Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University, a surprising factory of musical theater talent.

THURSDAY, APR. 4

Just south of us in Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University is doing incredible things with robots and AI, all of which have firmly established the school as a top STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) destination.

But did you know that the Carnegie Mellon School of Drama has been quietly churning out musical virtuosos at an astonishing pace?

Many of them end up in professional musical theater, including Josh Gad from *The Book of Mormon* and Leslie Odom Jr., Renee Elise Goldsberry, and Rory O'Malley from *Hamilton*.

Add to that list the PigPen Theatre Co. Brett Johnson, the director of the Mercyhurst Institute for Arts & Culture, said, "the members of PigPen Theatre Co. are all Carnegie Mellon-trained theater actors, and they bring that knowledge of storytelling, showmanship, and the communal nature of theater to their concerts."

While the group has two musical theater shows currently in the works (*The Tale of Despereaux* and *Water for*

Elephants, both based on novels), they have also taken their myriad instruments — including guitar, banjo, drums, accordion, keys, and more — on the road and will be performing an intimate but impactful concert in the Walker Recital Hall at Mercyhurst University. PigPen has, if you're curious, released two full-length albums (2012's *Bremen*, and 2015's *Whole Sun*), as well as an EP (*The Way I'm Running*), and they have a collection of imaginative cover songs available on their website and YouTube channel.

This group of seven musicians, singers, and performers met in Pittsburgh and formed a group that has dabbled in a variety of theatrical forms, but who remain true to the basic idea that each show is a tale which must envelop the audience in its inescapable magic.

Johnson added, "Our patrons will feel as if they're spending an hour or so in someone's living room, swapping stories and songs, as opposed to watching a traditional concert. We're in for a treat!" — Cara Suppa

7:30 p.m. // Walker Recital Hall, 501 E. 38th St. // Adults: \$20, Seniors: \$17.50, Students/Youth: \$15 // miac.mercyhurst.edu

Tropidelic Stomp Back to the Rook



Tropidelic's brand of reggae fusion always attracts a crowd at the King's Rook Club, which they will revisit on Friday, Apr. 5.

FRIDAY, APR. 5

Tropical vibes will be returning to Erie as the heavy-hitting Cleveland band Tropidelic makes an appearance at the King's Rook Club. The funk, reggae, rock, and hip-hop-infused band will be stopping by during their 2019 Winter/Spring Tour with special guests TreeHouse!.

Drummer of Tropidelic Rex Larkman states, "When we play the King's Rook everyone is there for the same reason, to dance and party to some in-your-face music. We sync with the crowd's energy so well, it makes for the loudest show we do!"

Tropidelic is comprised of six members that have been performing across the country for over four years together. Now signed by LAW records, the band always brings the heat to their performances with their unique musical personalities and dance-fueled setlists. With their album *Heavy is the Head* hitting No. 1 on the iTunes reggae chart in 2017, Tropidelic continues to make

strides. Along with a new album coming out this summer, they will be hosting their third annual Freakstomp Music Festival, performing on the 311 Caribbean Cruise, and more.

Joining them are TreeHouse!, a four-man, psychedelic reggae jam band from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina that has been playing together for seven years. On *Lifted*, the group's strongest studio album to date, they share words of positivity and encourage unity amongst their audiences. They also will be releasing a new album later this year.

Both bands have teamed up with renowned musical artists such as The Dirty Heads, Pepper, and many more. Tropidelic has even performed at big-time festivals such as Electric Forest and Vans Warped Tour.

Tropidelic packed the house when they performed at the King's Rook Club last year in October, so make sure to not miss out on your opportunity to jam out at one of the hottest shows this spring.

— Symone Crockett

8 p.m. // King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. // \$15 for current 2019 members, \$20 for non-current members (2019 membership included), ticket sales at the door on the day of the show, cash only // 21+ // tropidelic.com

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. trepci.org.

Smith Creative Writing Series: David Baker

Apr. 4 — 6 p.m.
Smith Chapel at Penn St. Behrend, 4701 College Dr. behrend.psu.edu.

Regional GSA Meeting

Apr. 4 — 6 to 8 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. events.eriellibrary.org.

Arthur Ganson Spring Show Lecture

Apr. 4 — 7 p.m.
Compton Hall at Edinboro U., 210 E. Normal St., Edinboro, PA 16444 events.edinboro.edu.

Annual Cascade Creek Cleanup

Apr. 6 — 9 to 11 a.m.
Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park, 1501 W. 6th St. leaferie.org.

Past Life Regression Course

Apr. 6 — 9 a.m. to noon
Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11th St. facebook.com.

Spring Admissions Open House

Apr. 6 — 9 a.m. to noon
Penn State Behrend, 4701 College Dr. behrend.psu.edu.

Story Shenanigans: Let it Grow

Apr. 6 — 10 to 11 a.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. events.eriellibrary.org.

Erie Handmade Fair

Apr. 6 — 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
St. John's Parish Center, 2216 Peach St. facebook.com.

Bluebird Program

Apr. 6 — 1 p.m.
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. trepci.org.

Hackathon: Full Tuition Scholarship Competition

Apr. 6 — 1 to 3 p.m.
Gannon University, 109 University Sq. hackathon.gannon.edu.

Choosing Poems

Apr. 6 — 2 to 3 p.m. & Apr. 8 — 6 to 7 p.m.
Multiple library locations events.eriellibrary.org.

Teen Advisory Board Meeting

Apr. 6 — 2 to 4 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. events.eriellibrary.org.

Modified Martial Arts

Apr. 6 — 3 to 4 p.m.
Iroquois Branch Library, 4212 Iroquois Ave. events.eriellibrary.org.

2019 International Night

Apr. 6 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Gannon Recreational & Wellness Center, 130 W.

4th St. gannon.edu.

After Dark Plus

Apr. 6 — 7:30 p.m. to midnight
Splash Lagoon Indoor Water Park, 8091 Peach St. splashlagoon.com.

Cinderella Project Prom Dress Giveaway

Apr. 7 — 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Bourbon Barrel, 1213 State St. bourbonbarrelerie.com.

Children's Entertainment Expo

Apr. 7 — 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Relax in free massage chairs while your kid enjoys balloons, bounce houses, face painting and more at annual Convention Center event.
Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier childrensentertainmentexpo.info.

Tick Awareness

Apr. 7 — 2 p.m.
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. trepci.org.

The Basics of Tea

Apr. 8 — 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.
Iroquois Branch Library, 4212 Iroquois Ave. events.eriellibrary.org.

Stress Management

Apr. 9 — 10 a.m. to noon
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. events.eriellibrary.org.

Basic Backyard Gardening

Apr. 9 — 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Millcreek Branch Library, 2088 Interchange Rd. Ste. 280 events.eriellibrary.org.

Home Buying 101

Apr. 9 — 6 to 7 p.m.
Iroquois Branch Library, 4212 Iroquois Ave. events.eriellibrary.org.

Recycling in Erie County

Apr. 9 — 6 to 7 p.m.

Asbury Woods Nature Center, 4105 Asbury Rd. registrationdesk.asburywoods.org.

Raising Chickens

Apr. 9 — 6 to 7:30 p.m.
Edinboro Branch Library, 413 W. Plum St., Edinboro, PA 16412 events.eriellibrary.org.

Open Mic Night

Apr. 9 — 6 to 8 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. events.eriellibrary.org.

Read to a Therapy Dog

Apr. 9 — 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. & Apr. 10 — 3:30 to 4:30 p.m.
Multiple library locations events.eriellibrary.org.

42nd Annual Writing Awards Night

Apr. 10 — 7:30 p.m.
Waldron Campus Center at Gannon Univ., 124 W. 7th St. events.gannon.edu.

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CALENDAR

Trohoske Releases a Dream Come True



SATURDAY, APR. 6

Last summer, celebrated local musician Stephen Trohoske released the wonderful seven-track album *Soundtrack of a Daydreamer*. It was available online, via streaming sites like Spotify and for download on Apple Music, but has eluded fans as a tangible release until now. What better place to celebrate such a new release than at Artlore Studio? Trohoske, along with his wife Lena Logvina, owns and operates the gallery and boutique which is

one of — and arguably the only — location that sells exclusively Erie-made products, most of them being fine art. The west side gallery will see many members that constitute Trohoske's band, not to be confused with his many other projects, which include Stephen Trohoske's Art Groupies. The album features guests such as Eric Brewer, Stix Thompson, Allen Zurcher, Gordon Marshall, Ian Maciak, Charles Brown, Abby Barrett, and Elle Vahey. Also appearing on the album are Tony Grey and Leon Hughes, both of whom helped produce the album. In addition to the live performance, there will be giveaways and refreshments for guests in attendance. The evening will also be a de facto celebration of Trohoske's birthday, which comes a mere two days later. — Nick Warren

8 p.m. to 10 p.m. // Artlore Studio, 3406 W. Lake Rd. // Free // facebook.com/Artlorestudio

Erie Micro Brewfest Pours Into The Brewerierie



SATURDAY, APR. 6

The Brewerierie at Union Station is known for its unique train station setting, live shows, art exhibits, and its assortment of locally crafted beers. This establishment has no problem with hosting events of all sorts, whether it's breakfast on St. Patrick's Day or the highly anticipated Arts and Drafts — it's created quite the wave for itself over the years.

On April 6, the Brewerierie will keep the conversation about good beer going with WQLN's 13th annual Erie Micro Brew Festival. So far, 28 different breweries from all over the region will be ready to share the history and science behind their craft beer, which attendees have the liberty to sample to their heart's content. With each company offering a "rare" beer (i.e. one not

available in grocery stores or six-pack shops), this day honors the underground brew over the corporate drinks of the mainstream.

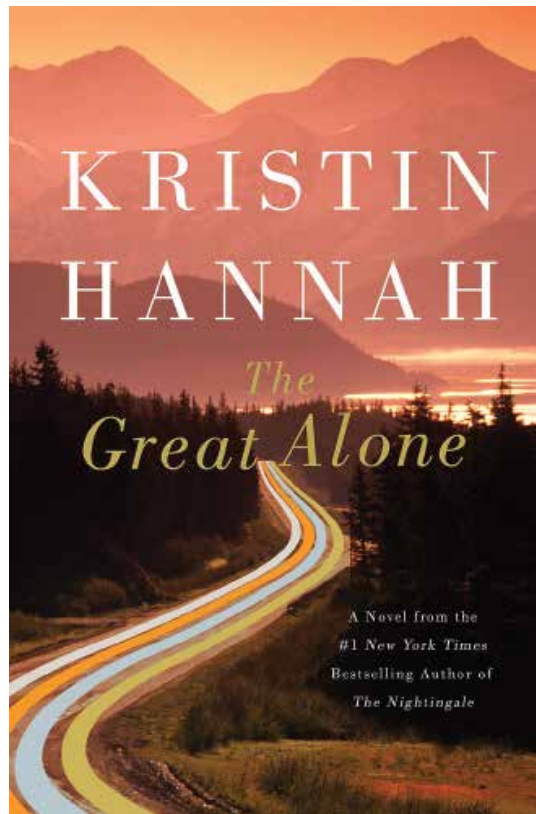
Advance tickets are available as well as VIP passes that entail a 45-minute early entry and a souvenir pint glass. If you're afraid that you may miss out on this zesty jubilee, there will be two sessions held on this day (1 to 4 p.m. or 5 to 8 p.m.), ensuring everyone has a chance to enjoy. Though the VIP experience is enhanced, supplies for the special pass are limited. You may want to put the Erie Micro Brewfest website into your browser and purchase yours immediately.

The Brewfest stands to be a delightful day for your mind and taste buds to be captivated by craft beer and great vibes. If you think that you may be a little too tipsy to make it back home, encourage a non-drinker friend to purchase a designated driver ticket. Be thirsty and be safe my friends. — Charles Brown

1 p.m. to 4 p.m or 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. // The Brewerierie at Union Station, 123 West 14th St. // \$40 advance, \$45 at the door, VIP session and designated driver rates available // 21+ // eriebeerfest.com

The Great Alone

Kristin Hannah crafts beautifully jarring coming-of-age story



With its perfectly chosen Alaskan backdrop and nuanced characterizations, Kristin Hannah's best-seller *The Great Alone* makes for a captivating read.

characters can run from the troubled Ernt. How Cora and Leni deal with the tragic consequences of Cora's decision to follow Ernt to Alaska marries beautiful writing with a clever plot and an unexpectedly uplifting climax.

The Great Alone is full of rich and varied characterizations. Most of the story is told through Leni's wondrously elemental child's point of view, and it's hard not to form a bond with her. The small supporting cast of two-fisted neighbors, with names like Large Marge and Mad Earl, backfill nicely with colorful characters.

The Great Alone is a striking example of a story that couldn't have unfolded anywhere except the place Hannah chose for it. She's selected a magnificent canvas for her word paintings and makes full use of the beauty that spawned several cable television series about Alaskan homesteaders. Her setting descriptions interlock with her characters' physical and emotional struggles like dance partners.

The Great Alone is also a *Romeo and Juliet* story of a too soon, forbidden love, told with grace and sensitivity, as teenage Leni and local boy Mathew discover each other, to the chagrin of Ernt.

The book is not without its shortcomings, like the quirky use of parenthetical phrases with no apparent justification, and the out-of-place, Amish-sounding names of her central characters Ernt, Leonora, and Coraline. The book may be a bit overlong for its arc, as well, at 433 pages. But these are minor gripes about a well-told and jarringly emotional story. A quintessential feminist novel that speaks eloquently to a broad audience, *The Great Alone* earns five stars.

St. Martin's; 433 pages; \$28.99 (hard cover) // Richard Perhacs practices law in Erie and holds a Master of Fine Arts in Popular Fiction. He can be reached with comments and suggestions for reviews at rperhacs@gmail.com.

By: Richard Perhacs

Kristin Hannah's best-selling coming-of-age novel *The Great Alone* is so much more than that — an intimately woven tapestry covering parts of two intense decades in the life of Leni Allbright, a girl transplanted to northern Alaska as a teen by her PTSD-scarred father. The latest of Hannah's 16 works, it's already optioned for film, and, in the hands of the right cast and director, should be one you'll want to see.

The Great Alone is also part *Alaska: The Last Frontier* and part *The Shining*. When former Vietnam POW Ernt Allbright inherits a cabin in remote Kaneq, Alaska from an Army buddy, he moves wife Cora and daughter Leni to a place where he hopes he "can breathe again." Breathing is the least of Ernt's problems as the deep indigo of the Alaskan winter fills every corner of their lives and cabin fever drives the last bit of self-control out of Ernt. With a history of violence, he turns on his wife and eventually his daughter in a series of increasingly brutal episodes that Hannah's vivid writing makes painful to read. You'll want to pull your eyes away from her razor cut description of domestic violence and skip ahead. But you won't be able to. This story sinks its hooks deep into the reader, and you'll no more be able to leave it than Hannah's

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MOVIE REVIEW

Untethered: Us is a Scary and Ambitious Jumble of Ideas

★★★★



Jordan Peele surprised the world two years ago with *Get Out*, a smart, tense and politically radical horror film that hit with audiences, critics, and the Academy. Needless to say, his follow-up film *Us* had a lot to live up to. Thankfully, Peele ups the ante with a film that is larger, more ambitious and even more socially and politically minded than his masterful debut. Unfortunately, sometimes the film's ambitions get in the way of its narrative.

Following the Wilson family on a trip to their summer home, the film seems to present us with an idyllic little beach community. However, mother Adelaide (Lupita Nyong'o) has an intense fear of this place stemming from a traumatic experience from her childhood. Her fears are realized when the family is visited by a clan of invaders who seem to be their own funhouse mirror replicas. The family soon finds themselves fighting for their lives against their devious doppelgängers.

Whereas *Get Out* was about race, this film is clearly about class. We are introduced to a literal lower class of shadow people who have suffered at the expense of the protagonists' comfortable existence. As such, the film makes for a terrific analogy for so-called "first world guilt" of living well while knowing that an unseen society is living in misery and knowing how easily those tables could be turned. The film's political anger reveals itself further when it goes from a home-invasion film into a full-blown apocalyptic nightmare. This is admirable, ambitious filmmaking that sadly doesn't always mesh with the story trying to be told. There are so many ideas that some of them get dropped just as they're getting interesting. That aside, *Us* is still a smart, scary and entertaining ride through most of its twisted story. — Forest Taylor

Written and directed by: Jordan Peele // Starring: Lupita Nyong'o, Winston Duke, Evan Alex, Shahadi Wright Joseph, Elisabeth Moss, Tim Heidecker, Cali Sheldon, Noelle Sheldon, Anna Diop, and Yahya Abdul-Mateen II // 116 minutes // Rated 'R'

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MUSIC REVIEWS

The Comet Is Coming

Trust in the Lifeforce of the Deep Mystery
Impulse!

★★★★★

I want to live in this record. There's something primordial and visceral about it that ends up being true magic at work here. Plenty of people have tried to channel the spirit of Pharoah Sanders, Alice Coltrane, and other pioneering jazz artists over the years. This London trio not only succeeds in capturing that lightning in a nine-track bottle, but also may be just reinventing it for a new generation. The band is made up of saxophonist "King Shabaka," keyboardist "Danalogue," and drummer "Betamax" (or Shabaka Hutchings, Dan Leavers, and Max Hallett if you want to take the mystery out of it). There's a slow burn in the first few tracks leading up to one of the best recordings of the year in "Summon The Fire," a hypnotic, pulsating trip that will get your mind swirling—the animated video by artist RUFFMERCY makes the perfect companion piece too. Things just continue to heat up from there, as EDM intermingles with acid jazz and spoken word artist Kate Tempest for a psychedelic journey. Thankfully, there are calming sections on the album's latter half like "Unity," providing for a narrative listening experience that's more effective than any lyrics could be. — Nick Warren



Amanda Palmer

There Will Be No Intermission
8 ft. Records

★★★★★

With a title that reads as less of a statement and more of a warning, Amanda Palmer's newest work is a lengthy one. For the artist's third proper album in more than a decade, she brings a lot to the album's mise-en-scene. It's nearly impossible to avoid the theatrical undercurrent that runs through this record, as it employs both the language of theater in addition to itself being a histrionic deluge of confessional songwriting. It really does read as a "one-woman show," with most tracks relying on minimal musical accompaniment by piano or ukulele. Palmer's lyrical prowess is difficult to deny, easily displayed in the tour-de-force opening (technically coming in the second track) of "The Ride." Every other track of the album's 20 is over five minutes long, with an instrumental precursor that's between 20 seconds and two minutes. There's no shortage of passion, as Palmer practically forces an intimate connection with the listener. By the end, even if you're relatively unfamiliar with the former Dresden Dolls member, you'll feel like you know her well. There's heartbreak ("A Mother's Confession"), anger ("The Thing About Things") and so much more. — Nick Warren



Ex Hex

It's Real
Merge Records

★★★★

With It's Real, Mary Timony and company return at long last for their sophomore album. 2014's Rips was a breath of fresh air when it came out, a real rock 'n' roll experience that seemed perfect for the times. In contrast, It's Real almost feels forced. Sure, Timony is an excellent guitar player (joined by bassist Betsy Wright and drummer Laura Harris), and the riffs abound on this record, but even from the first moment, it feels more at home as a Guitar Hero track than in an underground zine. If you're unfamiliar with Timony's discography, now is the time to go out and listen to every Helium record (and let's not forget her contribution to the supergroup Wild Flag in 2011), because they are nothing short of amazing. Those albums did come out more than 20 years ago, so the balloon may be sinking a bit. Employing a slightly processed vocal effect for most of the record, the sound seems intentionally grounded as a pastiche of '80s-era classic rock. Do the lyrics redeem it, juxtaposing new thoughts with old sounds? Nope. Save for high moments like "Diamond Drive," these tracks end up as a mostly forgettable album from an unforgettable artist. — Nick Warren



Jenny Lewis

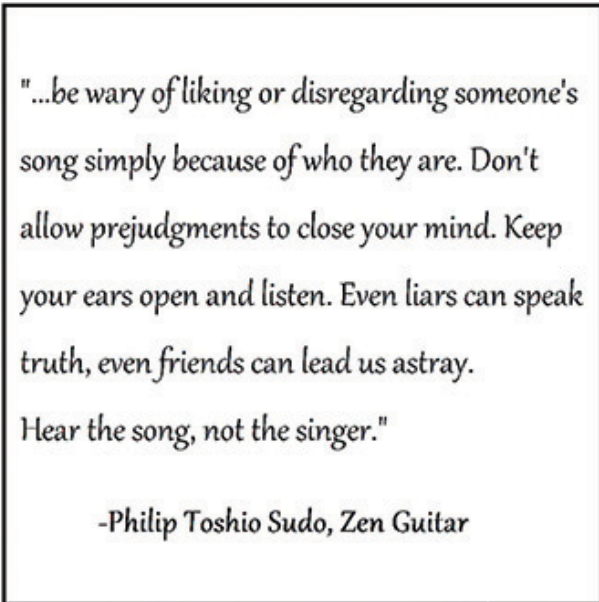
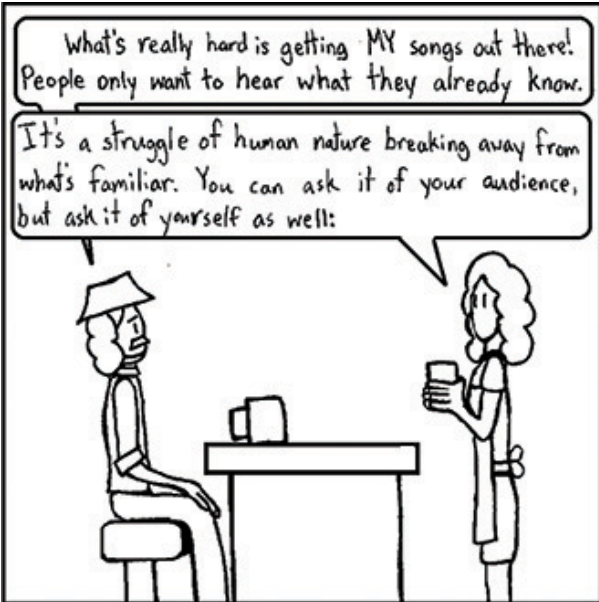
On The Line
Warner Bros.

★★★★★

Jenny Lewis is a treasure. At this point, it shouldn't feel shocking how consistently amazing she is, but it is. It's been five years since she released The Voyager. For most artists, a break like that is not a good sign, but for Lewis, it didn't slow her down at all. Concocting a pop-rock recipe with dashes of country and indie, the music Lewis is making isn't groundbreaking, it's just very well done, and that's okay. In fact, it makes it all the more refreshing. Despite the case she makes in the album's second track, Lewis has not, in fact, wasted her youth. Starting out as a child actress, Lewis landed starring roles in movies like Troop Beverly Hills and The Wizard. Defying the standard Hollywood path, she gained mountains of indie rock cred fronting Rilo Kiley in the 2000s. In 2006, she recorded her first watershed solo record, Rabbit Fur Coat, with help from the Watson Twins, blending alt-country harmonies with modern sensibilities, also lending her talents to Jenny & Johnny and Nice As Fuck. With a resume like that, you'd think maybe she had done enough, but one listen to fiery tracks like "Red Bull & Hennessey," and you'll be glad she hasn't. — Nick Warren



TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



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Across

1. Funny face?
6. Secretly included, in a way
11. "Dexter" channel, in TV listings
14. It might pick up a big fish
15. Up
16. Rooster's mate
17. His show replaced Larry King Live on CNN
19. Something a driver may "hang"
20. Thick Japanese noodle
21. 1970s Olympic gymnastics star Korbut
22. "A League of Their Own" director
27. Like favorite books, often
29. Long, long time
30. 2012 World Golf Hall of Fame inductee
35. Suffix with sex
36. "Black gold"
37. Klutz
40. #1 pick in the 1998 NFL draft
47. On the ____ (fleeing)
48. Ocean liners?
49. He sang "Penny Lane" and "Blackbird" during his 2018 Carpool Karaoke with James Corden
55. "My treat!"
56. Not worth ____
57. Chop (off)
58. 1954 Gregory Peck film ... or this puzzle's theme
65. Suffix with cannon or

Down

1. Mind reader's skill, for short
2. "You couldn't possibly mean me!?"
3. ____ Direction (boy band)
4. Unsettle
5. Org. that investigated Al Capone
6. Adrien of "The Pianist"
7. Ricochet
8. Big name in health plans
9. Tikkanen who won five Stanley Cups
10. Remote area?
11. NFL coach with a perfect 17-0 record in 1972
12. Katherine of "Knocked Up"
13. 7'1" Shaquille
18. "Salvator ____" (Leonardo da Vinci work that sold for \$450 million in 2017)
21. "That's terrible!"
22. Prettify
23. ____ sauce (sushi condiment)
24. Setting for part of "Forrest Gump," for short
25. Prot. or Cath.
26. Plea at sea

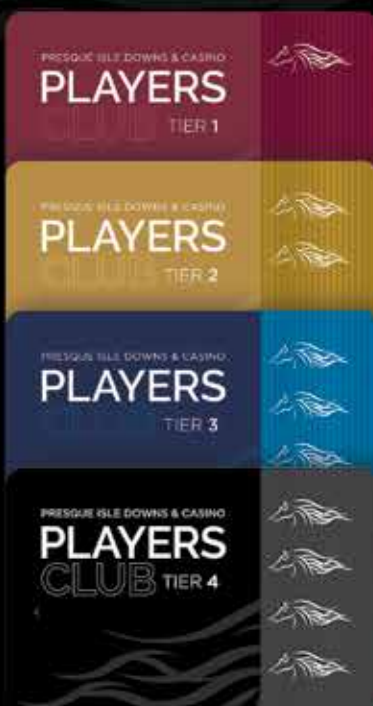
27. New York engineering sch.
28. Sounds of indifference
31. Dove's sound
32. Kith's partner
33. Word with Dutch or American
34. Clamorous
38. "____-Man and the Wasp" (2018 movie)
39. They're worth half of TDs
41. Vogue rival
42. Sweet potato
43. Starz alternative
44. Start to malfunction
45. Part of NGO
46. When doubled, a 2010s dance craze
49. ____ vortex (winter weather phenomenon)
50. Jumper cable connection
51. Worked from home?
52. Behind bars
53. "... old woman who lived in ____"
54. "HAHAHA!," in texts
58. "I vote no"
59. ____ Jima
60. It may be beaten and eaten
61. "Hollywood Squares" win
62. "____ qué?"
63. Coach Tyronn ____ whose Cleveland Cavaliers went to the NBA finals in 2016, '17 and '18
64. Ewoks or Jawas, in brief



Answers to last puzzle

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

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April 5
SASS Acoustics

April 6
Claire Stuczynski

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Fridays & Saturdays
7-9pm

April 5
Jeremy Jaeger Unplugged

April 6
The Acoustic-Jukebox

Five O'Clock Happy Hour Specials

5pm-7pm



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\$0.50 Wings



Monday
\$6 Burgers with French Fries
(excluding Burger of the Month)



Tuesday
\$2 Tacos
(Ground Beef or Chicken)



Wednesday
\$4 Pulled Pork Sandwich
with French Fries



Thursday
BOGO Wings



buzztime
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