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Nov. 18 - Dec. 15 // Vol. 10, No. 14 // ErieReader.com

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HOLIDAY SEASON  
MADE IN ERIE GIFT GUIDE**

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## From the Editors

### The gift of gratitude

All around the world, shopping small is going to look a little different this year.

Traditional European Christmas markets such as Nuremberg's Christkindlesmarkt (set in a quaint German village square), Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens Christmas Market (Danish amusement park rides festively aglow), and Barcelona's Fira de Santa Llucia (the Spanish capital's beautiful cathedral looming overhead) are all hallmarks of the holiday shopping season abroad — and likely several Hallmark movies. Tivoli and Fira will cautiously continue spreading yuletide cheer this year, but with COVID-19 spreading rapidly in Germany, Christkindlesmarkt has been canceled for the first time in 73 years.

North American reproductions of these cherished rites are also falling by the wayside, with the Toronto Christmas Market, Chicago's Christkindlmarket, and Philadelphia's Christmas Village being some of the more prominent examples. Although the Gem City has noelthing on the same scale as those major metropolises, our calendar section (still on print hiatus) is typically stuffed like a Thanksgiving turkey with events such as WQLN's Holiday Craft Show, Asbury Woods' Schoolhouse Craft Festival, the Erie Handmade Fair, and the Made in Erie Marketplace. With dozens of pop-up stations featuring artists, artisans, and craftspeople of every persuasion, they are perfect occasions to pick up one-of-a-kind gifts. This year, however, they're all off the menu.

But just like Santa, just because you can't see a storefront doesn't mean they don't exist. E-commerce and social media marketing have provided a Rudolph-esque beacon of hope amidst a blizzard of uncertainty for independent sellers such as Katie LeVan, Kaitlyn Page, and Heather Cash. From Facebook to Etsy to Pinterest to Instagram, these talented local artists know firsthand about the cornucopia of creativity awaiting you behind your computer, tablet, and/or smartphone screens. If you can't buy, like, share, subscribe, or bookmark a website. And if you have a talent of your own worth sharing, the women say, please do not hide.

Erie's independently owned brick-and-mortar stores won't be, as their proprietors encourage safely supporting local on Shop Small Saturday (Nov. 28) and beyond. Wear a mask, wash and sanitize your hands, and get out and explore before the rush if you can. Whether you choose to do your shopping in-person (we might suggest the Shops at the Colony Plaza, which hosts 20 unique locally owned businesses) or online, Liz Allen and our annual Made in Erie Gift Guide (compiled by Nick Warren) should provide ample inspiration. If you've ever unenthusiastically unwrapped a box of whitey-tighties and tube socks on Christmas morning (or an embarrassing pink bunny costume), you're aware of the alternative.

Truly, gift-giving is an art. Like art, the "best" gifts are motivated by creativity, imagination, thought, and emotion. They are a reflection of both the giver and the recipient. They're memorable because their exchange uniquely frames some aspect of a relationship or connection. As we tear away their wrapping paper, we're inspired to laugh, cry, blush, jump up and down, roll our eyes, or just express our genuine gratitude.

In an especially miserly 2020, getting that kind of reaction is no small feat.



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## Your 2020 Elections Recap

Examining results of local races and Erie County's impact in the presidential election



SIMONIQUE DIETZ

By: Ben Spегgen

In more ways than not, Erie County, Pennsylvania looks much the same after the 2020 general election. But, the change that *did* happen has received — and will continue to receive — the national spotlight.

Unless you've been buried beneath rocks or unplugged from glowing screens both large and small, you likely already know that. But let's recap.

Filed under Absolutely-No-Surprises-There: Pennsylvania State Reps. Pat Harkins, Bob Merski, Curt Sonney, and Parke Wentling, representing General Assembly Districts 1, 2, 4, and 17, respectively, are all headed back to the halls of Harrisburg without any headaches on the campaign trail, as they all ran uncontested re-election bids. Along party lines, it's an even split, with Harkins and Merski representing the Democrats and Sonney and Wentling representing Republicans.

Filed under Not-A-Shocker: In the race for the General Assembly 3rd Legislative District, Democratic incumbent Ryan Bizzarro handily defeated his Republican challenger Greg Hayes by 8,236 votes — or, 22,217 to 13,981. Following the election, House Dems in

Pa. announced Bizzarro would serve in the leadership capacity of Democratic Policy Chair.

Filed under As-We-Would-Have-Expected: Republican incumbent to the General Assembly 6th Legislative District Brad Roae held off Democratic challenger Matt Ferrence, defeating him 5,412 to 3,463, or a margin of 1,949.

Filed under Most-Local-Eyes-Were-On-This-Race: In the hotly contested race for State Senate District 49, Erie voters elected to send incumbent Dan Laughlin back to Harrisburg for a second term. Of the 116,907 votes cast, Laughlin, a Republican, received 69,813. His Democratic challenger, Julie Slomski, received 46,900.

Most were watching this race, because, with a nightly barrage of TV commercials, a seemingly never-ending-amount-of pop-ups and ads on social platforms, and what seemed to be enough flyers mailed to start a 13-mile-wide bonfire, this race was hard to ignore. While that inundation may have lent to the appearance of the race being close, Laughlin prevailed with a 22,913-vote margin.

Filed under The-Past-Is-The-Present-Again: Democratic challenger for the PA-16 congressional seat Kristy Gnibus notched 68,463 votes to Re-

publican incumbent Mike Kelly's 65,640, putting the Erie County native and political newcomer up by 2,823 votes in her backyard. But Erie alone does not make up PA-16; it includes Crawford, Mercer, and Lawrence counties, and a portion of the incumbent's home county: Butler. Kelly won each of those other counties, totaling 207,472 votes to Gnibus' 142,232.

It's not the first time an Erieite challenged Kelly. Just two years ago, Erie County's Ron DiNicola took a run at PA-16 but fell short by 11,239 (124,109 to Kelly's 135,348) in 2018's midterm elections.

So while Gnibus fell to Kelly by a larger margin, she did notch more overall votes than DiNicola did. Like Gnibus, DiNicola was unable to win any other county aside from Erie, which he did top by Kelly by a larger margin (60 percent to Kelly's 40) than Gnibus did.

The increase of votes cast in 2020 compared to 2018 is largely explained by the race at the top of the ticket. The big show. The race to which more Americans — and perhaps the world — pay attention to than anything else: the presidential election.

But before we get to that, let's note: The numbers presented here come from local, state, and national unofficial final counts, which include all legally cast ballots, many more of which were this time cast by mail, Pennsylvania included.

Due to Act 77, the election reform bill signed by Gov. Tom Wolf on Oct. 31, 2019, Pennsylvanians were now able to cast no-excuse mail-in ballots. Plus, the COVID-19 pandemic's impact weighed heavily on voter habits, as many opted not to vote in-person out of an abundance of caution.

This led to, again, something you've likely heard about already but bears repeating: Baseless accusations of voter fraud. That hit home in Erie, as a USPS worker told Project Veritas he allegedly overheard the postmaster

general giving directions to backdate ballots received after the state-imposed deadline. Just days later, after an investigation was launched, Richard Hopkins told USPS investigators he had fabricated the account and recanted. But before that, newly re-elected Republican Senator in South Carolina Lindsey Graham gave the story oxygen in the mainstream media. So did others elsewhere, including the 45th President of the United States on Twitter.

So, all the aforementioned races could also be filed under: Things stayed the same. But the one that cannot be is the race between Republican incumbents President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence and their Democratic challengers, former Vice President Joe Biden at the top of the card and California Senator Kamala Harris as his Vice President.

After flipping red for the first time since 1984 during President Ronald Reagan's re-election bid, Erie County — a reliable, traditionally blue county — went to Trump. Many might recall the night it happened, when Pennsylvania was still a toss-up, and upon getting the news that Erie went to Trump, it tipped the state scales to Trump, and Pennsylvania became projected for him. That is, as Erie went red, Pennsylvania followed.

Now, Erie is again getting the spotlight. After Trump edged out Democratic challenger Hillary Clinton in 2016, national correspondents parachuted in, Googled "diners in Erie, PA," sat with folks in booths with cups full of coffee and plates full of eggs, and asked them: *So what the heck happened?* in an electoral analysis ouroboros.

In between then and the election, major news outlets pointed to Erie as a bellwether not just for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, but also for the country. Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. John Fetterman weighed in, noting often that "so goes Erie, so goes Pennsylvania, and so goes Pennsylvania, so goes the nation."

The national reporters have already been — and will continue to be — back, assumedly asking again: *So what the heck happened?*

On Election Day, a Tuesday that

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## NEWS & VIEWS

YEAR	ERIE DEM	ERIE REP	ERIE MARGIN	PA DEM	PA REP	PA MARGIN	US DEM	US REP
2020*	68,286	66,869	1,417 D	3,423,976	3,354,836	69,140	78,774,188	73,135,239
2016	58,112	60,069	1,957 R	2,926,441	2,970,733	44,292	65,853,514	62,984,828
2012	68,036	49,025	19,011 D	2,990,274	2,680,434	309,840	65,915,795	60,933,504
2008	75,775	50,351	25,424 D	3,276,363	2,655,885	620,478	69,498,516	59,948,323

\*2020 VOTE TOTALS NOT FINALIZED AS OF 1/16/20

seemed to last 117 hours, Americans went to bed not knowing the outcome of the election. And, depending where you were looking, Electoral College tallies were different. The similarity, though, was that Biden was ahead of Trump. And, while both were short of the necessary 270 Electoral College votes necessary to be declared the election's winner, Biden had more paths to victory than Trump. Trump would have needed to sweep most of the remaining board, while Biden could've used various combinations of some states.

As Tuesday wore on into Wednesday, then tumbled towards Thursday, and flowed over to Friday, the likelihood of a Biden victory was becoming more apparent. As moderator for *Meet The Press* Chuck Todd said, in essence, more than a few times: We know the outcome; we just don't know how we're going to get there.

Then, we did.

And it was Pennsylvania, tipping Biden over the 270-threshold, while other states remained in play. The coup de gras: No path to victory for Trump did not include the Keystone State, while Biden could have lost Pa. but won the election by picking up other states.

Biden's victory in Erie County marks the slimmest margin dating back to 2000. Second to that comes the only Republican claim to Erie County since 1984 at 1,957.

Before the Obama era, President George W. Bush won re-election over Democratic challenger John Kerry in 2004, but Kerry topped Bush by 144,248 votes in Pa. and 10,549 in Erie County. Four years before that, although he became the 43rd President of the United States, Bush lost to Democratic nominee Al Gore by 204,840 in Pa. and 10,372 in Erie County.

Voter turnouts in Pa. from 2016 back through 2000 were, in round numbers by percentage: 61, 58, 62, 60, and 52, respectively.

Voter turnouts nationally from 2016

back through 2000 where, in round numbers: 59, 55, 57, 56, and 50.

While unofficial counts are being made official, a process that does take time and is common practice following elections and is not the result of nefarious interference, it is projected that voter turnout in 2020's general election, nationally, will be around 70 percent. The closest our nation came to that in the history of the modern American presidency is the 1960 election between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon at 63 percent.

What does this all add up to?

On the afternoon of Friday, Nov. 13, major outlets took the last two remaining uncalled states off the board: North Carolina went to Trump, and for the first time in 28 years, Georgia went blue, going to Biden. The final Electoral College count from CNN: Biden, 306; Trump, 232.

While the unofficial count still needs to be made official, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, who has made history as the first woman and first African-American and Asian-American woman elected to vice president, have won both the Electoral College and the popular vote.

The Biden-Harris ticket has received more votes nationally than any other candidate in the history of the United States at 78.8 million.

Likewise, Donald Trump and Mike Pence, with 73.1 million votes, have received more votes than any sitting president and vice president before them.

Like only a few other sitting presidents before him (Hoover in 1932; Ford in 1976; Carter in 1980; H.W. in 1992), Trump becomes just the fifth president in modern American history to lose as an incumbent. Ford remains an outlier, as the nation's only president to have been neither elected to the presidency or vice presidency. National turnout in those elections: 53, 54, 53, and 55, respectively.

For Pennsylvania, it's back to being blue, mirroring the nation with a no-

table uptick in voter turnout. Yet the margin of victory for Democrats isn't where it had been before losing it in 2016. And the same can be said for Erie.

On voter turnout alone, this election will be called historic. Other reasons include: The incumbent's refusal to concede, despite having lost both the Electoral College and the popular vote, leaving no path to victory, and having no substantiated evidence of voter fraud that's being claimed to have manipulated the election's outcome.

We are living in the interregnum now — the period between the election night and the inauguration, a period historically marked by the peaceful transition of power.

A key feature that has made America itself over the course of this experiment in government has been that peaceful transition. Many point to Washington's channeling of Cincinnatus in not seeking never-ending power despite having it as an option on the table. Others point to Adams conceding to Jefferson and becoming the first president to be ousted after just one four-year term and accepting the results of that election.

Pundits, scholars, pollsters, and voters continue to unfurl speculations of what will unfold between now and Jan. 20, 2021, the date of inauguration. What we do know is that on Dec. 14, electors from all 50 states plus the District of Columbia meet to cast their ballots for president. During the early days of January, the newly elected Congress will meet — first the House, then the Senate for a formal electoral vote count.

These have been nothing more than mere formalities in our country's past. Whether they remain historically so by the time we get there this go-around will be seen in the coming hours, weeks, days, and months.

*Ben Spегgen can be contacted at [bSpегgen@ErieReader.com](mailto:bSpегgen@ErieReader.com). You can follow him on Twitter @BenSpегgen.*

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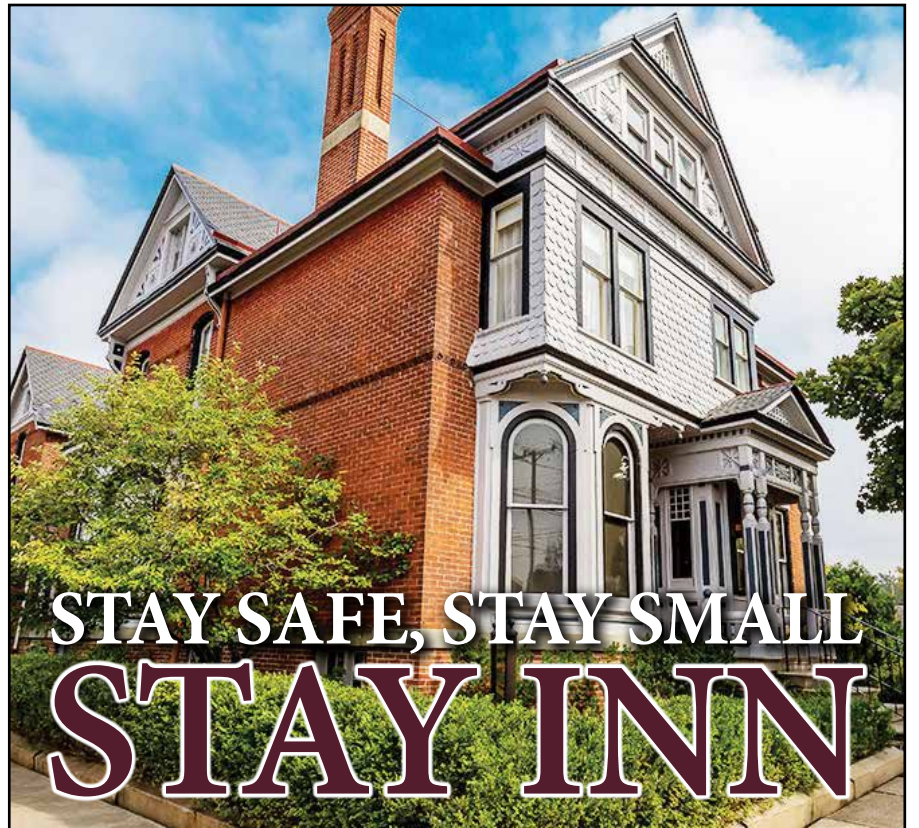


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## International Recycling Group Finds Home in Erie

Startup aims for plastic recycling rates of 90 percent at \$100 million facility



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**International Recycling Group, spearheaded by founder and chairman Mitch Hecht (pictured), will begin construction on a \$100 million plastic recycling facility in Erie next year, slated for completion in 2022. Hecht's goal is to go from 90 percent of plastics in landfills to 90 percent recycled plastics within the next 15 years.**

sition. "Erie is literally 40 miles to the south of where we need to deliver our clean material to a steel company up in Nanticoke, Ontario."

Hecht had been working with Cap-Zone, a group that had previously committed funding to Erie, about how to try to access the opportunity zone funding. He then called up the Cap-Zone CEO Al Pachula to talk about Erie Insurance. "I found out they had a meeting with them the following week and he invited me to join. So I did."

"[Erie Insurance] told me they wanted to develop the next generation of industry in Erie, and we think recycling is perfect — adding that in fact, there was a huge downstream plastics economy that could be natural customers for our recycled post-consumer resins."

IRG was then introduced to Plastek Group and Penn State Behrend, which has one of the largest undergraduate polymers research institutes and programs in the country. "And within weeks there was a whirlwind of meetings with several groups and it just was so obvious that this was a perfect fit for where our business needed to be."

What was born from that was a handshake deal in January, and then an arduous due diligence process and final completion of the transaction.

"When COVID hit and I thought, everybody's going to take the opportunity to either cancel the deal because of the economic uncertainty, and the world will just stop investing in things, and businesses will be shut down. But by the time we closed on our transaction in August, the handshake deal that we had in January with Erie Insurance and the Plastek Group was exactly the deal that resulted after all the legal documentation was done. Incredible kudos and credit to the integrity of everyone involved in the transaction."

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, in the United States, only about 7 percent of all plastics that enter the municipal solid waste stream

are recycled. As noted on their website, the goal of IRG is to find value in every part of post-use plastic. Combined with plastic scrap generated by industrial and commercial industries, the group estimates that annually, over 50 million tons of plastic scrap are destined for landfills. Their technology will be able to accept all types of plastic—not just bottles. Thus, this "single streaming," or the combination of all plastics into a recycling bin, will now become a reality.

But as for how one gets into the plastics recycling industry to begin with?

"My partner [Doug] and I came out of the steel industry. I was looking for ways to reduce our fuel costs for coal. By accident, I came upon this article that Japan and Western Europe were taking waste plastic that they didn't have a recyclable application for — because they don't have landfills — and they were getting rid of it in the blast furnace of steel mills because it's a zero-oxygen environment in extremely high temperatures."

Zero-oxygen environment means no burning — and no combustion.

"It's really just eliminating plastic by vaporizing. Getting rid of that material was an ideal way to remove a lot of plastic from a landfill or the waste stream. When I looked at it, I thought, we've got more waste plastic going to landfills in this country than anywhere in the world on a per capita basis, why aren't we doing that here?"

His research found that coal was so cheap in the U.S. that one needed government subsidies to support such a program at the time because the steel operator would rather take coal.

"You couldn't manufacture the material for it to be cheap enough where you make money, or you could cover the cost. That was in 2004."

But in 2007 things changed. "All of a sudden, coal prices went from being incredibly cheap now to shooting through the roof, because all of the fossil fuels coming out of China. All of our raw materials were skyrocketing. And at that point, I realized coal now used by a steel mill was more expensive."

That's when Hecht started knocking on the doors of the guys in the North American steel industry that he used

By: Rebecca Styn

On the heels of Wabtec's looming layoffs is a glimmer of good news in the world of manufacturing in Erie.

International Recycling Group (IRG), a New York City-based startup, will soon be setting up shop in the Gem City. The group will build what it describes as the world's largest plastics recycling facility at a price tag of \$100 million.

I recently had the opportunity to talk to the founder and chairman of the group, Mitch Hecht, who will soon be an Erieite himself; anticipating his move in mid-November. "I signed a lease in an area in the city known as OWB [Our West Bayfront]. Coming from New York, where we have Soho, Doho, and all these little nicknames, I thought the OWB was cool."

IRG's CEO will soon be moving to Erie as well. Chris Dow hails from down under. He currently resides in Melbourne, Australia, but COVID has delayed his move.

How Erie came to be was somewhat serendipitous — a mix of the right location, right time, and a sprinkling of investment (a combined \$9 million from Erie Insurance and Erie-based Plastek Group) didn't hurt either. IRG plans to be at full commission by the end of 2022, with 50 new jobs — and a hopeful future expansion that could increase employment to more than 150.

"We plan to break ground beginning of next year and then hopefully by the end of 2022 it will be completed. It's roughly an 18-month development," says Hecht.

The group was first introduced to Erie by the way of Erie Insurance, when they saw on the news that EIG had established a \$50 million opportunity zone fund. "That was of critical importance to learn about because the toughest financing that you need to raise always is something called pre-development funding, but it's really the seed capital that we needed to finalize development of a plan."

In looking at the location on the map, he then realized Erie was in a prime po-



## NEWS & VIEWS

to work with.

"They said, if you can make a material that is clean and energy consistent, we'll buy every ounce of it that you can make. So that's how it got started."

Mitch said he expects that uses other than steel mills will be found for all grades of plastic.

"Our model is really intended to create a bridge. Our goal would be to send material (to a steel mill) only if we can't find another market for that material. That would be our long-term goal."

It's the classic chicken and the egg.

"Many plastics don't have a recycling application because nobody is collecting those plastics efficiently because there is no market for the material. So, the question is, how do we get from 10 percent recycled recovery of all plastics to 90 percent of recovery and turned back into products? The only way you can do that is creating a box where we're driving every single type of plastic and resin."

But in October the group had signed a memo of understanding with Canada-based steelmaker StelCo Inc. IRG will plan to sell the company a proprietary blend of plastics that has a high

energy value that can be used to offset coke in the production of iron oxide.

Hecht believes those markets will continue to develop.

"And then we'll start pulling the material away from the steel mill and start providing the material to the recyclers. Our goal is that we go from 90 percent landfill today of plastics to 90 percent recycled plastics." A lofty goal — one that Hecht believes will take upwards of 15 years — but one that would provide a positive environmental impact for generations to come.

Hopefully through this initiative, Erie will play a small role in not only saving a part of the environment — but helping our community grow in tandem — with the help of a little startup from New York City.

*Rebecca Styn is the proprietor of Room 33 Speakeasy. She is also VP of Ventures at Erie Innovation District and recently completed her Ph.D. in Leadership and Organizational Learning from Gannon University. Follow Room 33 on Facebook @room33speakeasy, and follow Rebecca on Twitter at @rstyn.*



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## Make Big Plans to Shop Small

Local businesses make splash for holidays



LIZ ALLEN

By: Liz Allen

Orange-stuffed olives. Red Flyer wagons. A “green” alternative to white paper towels.

Make a plan to shop local after Black Friday and you will enjoy a fun, multi-hued experience. You should also be nimble enough to seek out new destinations for your shopping excursions and to broaden your notion of what constitutes a gift.

With the challenges brought on by the pandemic, it’s critical for Small Business Saturday to succeed on Nov. 28 and for customers to embrace the “shop local” movement throughout the holiday season, according to Emily Fetcko, assistant director of the Erie Downtown Partnership and manager of its Main Street program.

“Shop Local” is more than a cute slogan, she said. “It’s time to get it off the sweatshirt and get it into action,” she said. “Make it a verb instead of just a nice idea.”

In Downtown Erie, businesses have pledged “an abundance of caution” with their COVID-19 protocols so that customers can experience “an abundance of joy,” Fetcko said.

This is also the time to put yourself in the shoes of business owners. She used Chido’s Dry Cleaners, 1103 State St., as an example. With more people working

remotely, there are fewer business suits to be cleaned, so she suggested thinking of some other items that might need to be cleaned, like your drapes. That way, you tidy up the house and support a local business.

Whether in Downtown Erie or elsewhere, local business owners are committed to customer safety this season.

“Along with many other small business owners, we are diligently sanitizing and doing our best to enforce mask policies. Everyone knows they should do that because they are concerned about their own and their neighbor’s safety,” said Tracey Bowes, owner of Pressed Books & Coffee at Greengarden Place, the plaza located at West Eighth Street and Greengarden Road across from Frontier Park.

Unlike big box stores, local businesses usually don’t have long lines, so it’s easy to social distance, she said. But all stores get busier as holidays loom, so Bowes suggests shopping early, especially as COVID-19 numbers spike. “I am very hopeful that things won’t be shut down, but there is not an iron-clad guarantee,” she said.

Puzzles are a great gift for kids and adults every winter, but especially this year, when we will be hunkering down to stay healthy.

Now is also a cool time to introduce

**Baking kits, cookbooks, card games, stationery, and more can be found on the shelves of Pressed Bookstore & Coffee, located in Greengarden Place, the plaza at West Eighth and Greengarden Road across from Frontier Park.**

youngsters to the kitchen. “We have a gingerbread cookie baking set, a Christmas tree baking set, as well as general start-baking sets and even kid-safe knives and cutting board sets and, of course, kids’ cookbooks to go with them,” Bowes said.

And who wouldn’t have fun with a Harry Potter wand set, Lego-themed stationery and journals and “Mad Libs” Christmas cards? With Toys R Us gone, Bowes said her store and Inside the Jelly Jar in the Colony Plaza fill a needed niche with their toy selections.

Bowes and her husband Casey own Greengarden Place, home to a number of specialty businesses and retailers, including Buona Cucina Oils and More. Bowes is a big fan of the olives stuffed with orange peel sold at Buona Cucina. “They are delicious and they surprise you,” Bowes said.

Surprising finds are a bonus of shopping local. Walking to Greengarden Place to check out the fused oils, extra virgin olive oils, balsamic vinegars, teas, hand-blown cruets and recipes at Buona Cucina, I discovered The Reskhued Piece at 1648 W. Eighth St., which sells custom-painted furniture, kitchen cabinets and specialty paints, including lush and lovely milk paint.

In similar fashion last year, I stumbled upon chocolate-covered red seedless grapes at Pulakos Chocolates, which has stores at East 26th and Parade streets and at the Millcreek Mall. I called to make sure the grapes are still available (they are) and learned that Pulakos also sells chocolate-dipped bacon, sprinkled with sea salt.

The eastside Pulakos is one of 29 local businesses participating in the Small Business Saturday/Shop Small promotion organized by the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network. The promotion has three zones: Historic Little Italy, Parade and 26th Street, and The Hill District. Pick up a passport at a participating business or download one at the “latest news” section on [ss-jnn.org](http://ss-jnn.org). Have your passport validated at four participating businesses and

you are eligible for a gift giveaway on Nov. 30.

Two long-standing businesses, Miller Brothers Power Equipment, 2111 State St., and Mighty Fine Donuts, 2612 Parade St., have joined the passport promotion this year. Also new to the list are Copper Carriage Antiques, 1909 Chestnut St.; Flower Kitchen, accessible at the West 23rd Street entrance to St. John’s Lutheran Church on Peach Street; and Herb & Honey Bakery, in Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meats (which also participates), at 310 E. 24th St.

The number and variety of vibrant businesses in Erie’s central city corridors always amaze me. As a loyal patron of Kraus Department Store, 810 Parade St., I had to include this family business, now in its 135th year, on the list of places to shop local.

Joe Nowosielski, who runs the business with two of his brothers, his son and his nephews, remembers when his father, grandfather, and uncle would play Santa Claus at Christmastime. You can step back in time before you even step inside the store by window-shopping for the Red Flyer wagon and the Red Flyer tricycle on display in front of a fireplace mantle. There’s also a metal shopping cart, one of the items Kraus sells to elderly clientele who live nearby.

Because a lot of customers lack transportation, the store also sells bicycles and inner tubes, although bikes are hard to find this year due to supply chain issues, Nowosielski said.

I love to browse the aisles for U.S.-made cast-iron cookware, bird feeders, 99-cent greeting cards and handy gadgets, such as snow scrapers. Nowosielski said that stocking seasonal products “is what keeps us going, [what makes us] so diversified.”

If you are searching for items made in Erie, many local businesses can accommodate you.

Pressed sells Erie-made cards, jewelry, and candy.

Edinboro Market, 109 Erie St. in Edinboro, features 42 different local food producers and food entrepreneurs, but in recent weeks, it has added locally produced food-related items, according to Marti Martz, president of the non-profit market.

Each item comes with a “producer



**A Red Flyer tricycle and Red Flyer wagon sit in the display window of Kraus Department Store, 810 Parade St., which has been a staple of shopping local for over 135 years.**

LIZ ALLEN

profile” about the entrepreneur and the product. For example, Simon Camp’s company, Green Wood Works, makes rolling pins, kitchen utensils, and measuring spoons from his family’s American chestnut trees in Meadville.

LizzieBeth’s, Beth Ivanic’s company in Saegertown, makes “untowels” and other green products to counter our throw-away culture. The “untowel” roll works this way: “There’s terrycloth on one side and beautiful fabric on the other side. You tear one off every day, throw them in the laundry (after use), and at the end of the week, snap it back together again,” Martz said.

Nestled inside Edinboro Market is the Boro Sweet Shop, a for-profit business operated by Martz’s husband, Curt Hals, that sells coffee, tea, and many delectable sweets, including goodies for those on vegan, gluten-free and other types of diets.

In addition to indulging your sweet tooth, you can also expand your cultur-

al horizons during the holidays.

Patrick Fisher, director of Erie Arts & Culture, says that buying memberships and subscriptions to local institutions is a wise way to help them weather the pandemic. In addition, patronizing local art and gift galleries and pottery shops benefits both the artisans and the local business owners, he said.

Don’t assume that art is too rich for your blood.

A holiday exhibit at 1020 Collective, 1020 Holland St., will feature “affordable art to warm your heart,” according to Alexa Potter, president of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Art Association, which is sponsoring the show in collaboration with Chroma Guild and students from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania’s Master of Fine Arts program.

The “affordable art” tagline comes from celebrated graphic artist and Edinboro professor Shelle Barron, said Potter. To acknowledge the difficult

financial circumstances so many are facing, artists will each include at least one piece under \$100 in the show, Potter said. The show, which is cash and carry, will also include jewelry, ceramics and holiday ornaments, she said. The artwork will also more accurately reflect the diversity of Erie’s artistic community.

The show opens Friday, Nov. 27, from 6 to 9 p.m., continues Nov. 28 and Nov. 29 from noon to 6 p.m. and then runs Thursdays through Sundays from noon to 6 p.m. through Dec. 21 or by appointment at 814-983-8566.

A love of art is also at the center of Shelly Schening’s store, Sammi’s Heartfelt Treasures. On Nov. 11, the store marked its one-year anniversary in the old Jarecki Jewelers at 21 W. Ninth St.

I became enamored with Sammi’s exterior and interior during the final Gallery Night of 2019 last December. I like the way Schening uses the old wooden jewelry cabinets to display some of the oodles of items she sells, including local crafts and antiques. “The built-ins are one of the things that attracted me to the store and just the vibe that it gives off,” she said.

An artisan herself, Schening wants to provide art workspace for people struggling with mental illness, although those plans are on hold now due to COVID-19. Instead, she welcomes those who need to talk with a place to sit and chat.

She’s also added the Peapod Shop, where kids can buy gifts for \$5 and under for family, friends and teachers. It’s a welcome addition when so many kids are going to school remotely and can’t

buy things at their school’s Secret Santa shop.

Like many small businesses, Sammi’s Heartfelt Treasures is a family enterprise. Schening’s husband, John, laid the flooring and did the painting, but the shop is “100 percent my shop,” she said. “For 15 or 16 years I’ve dreamed of this, but it was never the right time or I didn’t have the money,” she said. “Finally, one day, the stars aligned and here I am.”

Here, too, in her gem of a store, you can meet the resident rabbit, Cinna Bun-Bun, a silky black Netherlands dwarf bunny. Color me happy.

*Liz Allen was delighted to find baseball socks for her sports-loving husband at Sammi’s Heartfelt Treasures last Christmas. You can reach her at lizallenerie@gmail.com.*

**Learn more**

To explore what’s new this holiday season in downtown Erie, including a map of light displays, visit the Erie Downtown Partnership at [eriedowntown.com](http://eriedowntown.com) or follow the organization on social media.

For a list of the 29 businesses participating in the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network’s annual Shop Small/Small Business Saturday event on Nov. 28, visit [ssjnn.org](http://ssjnn.org) and click on “latest news.”

To learn about holiday plans for North East, including Sugar Plum Sunday, visit the North East Area Chamber of Commerce at [nechamber.org](http://nechamber.org)

To learn about Girard’s newest business, the Crick Coffee House & Eatery at 236 W. Main St., visit [facebook.com/thecrickcoffeehouse](https://facebook.com/thecrickcoffeehouse). Manager Jackson Loept said you can grab a local coffee from the Happy Mug or enjoy a full meal, then visit the many unique gift shops nearby.

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# 2020 Made in Erie Gift Guide

Having yourself an Erie little Christmas

By: Nick Warren

Shopping local! It's the name of the game. This year in particular it's important to support regional businesses, as the economic impact of the pandemic continues to take its toll. Thankfully, Erieites are a creative and resourceful lot. Not only are there plenty of options as far as Erie-made gifts go, but there's a myriad of different ways to purchase them. This is the sixth annual edition of the Made in Erie Gift Guide and it barely scratches the surface. There's a nearly endless supply of things made in our area by our community.

## A Holiday Box from Gone Local



There's an easy hack for finding the right Erie gifts this year. Just go to [gonelocalerie.com](http://gonelocalerie.com) and they have just about everything you could want for — as the name implies — your local gifting needs. The centerpiece of this year's selection is one of their specially curated Holiday Boxes. There are three: The Great Lake, The Gem City Giant, and The Presque Isle Premium, each of increasing size and complexity. Be sure to act fast, as pre-orders for these close on Nov. 22. If you miss that date, don't fear, because the Gone Local site has over 150 different items to choose from, made by dozens of nearby makers, starting at \$1. // [gonelocalerie.com](http://gonelocalerie.com)

## Local Music from Bandcamp

Looking for a way to support your friendly neighborhood musician? Bandcamp.com has become one of the top sources for independently made music and big-name artists alike. In March, the deal became even sweeter. In an effort to help put more money into the pockets of



musicians in need, Bandcamp decided to waive its fees one Friday. This, thankfully, became a monthly ritual for the site known as Bandcamp Fridays. The next one is on Dec. 4, leaving just the right amount of time for shipping. Aside from looking up your favorites, you can search for the tag "Erie," or consult a healthy list we made online this May, or better yet, circumvent it and just ask the artists themselves. // [Bandcamp.com](http://Bandcamp.com)

## Video Games by Whitethorn Games



Ideal for any locally-minded gamer in your life, Whitethorn Games offers up a slew of games to choose from on a wide range of platforms. Whether you're looking to play on Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, PS4, Steam or more, Whitethorn has a gorgeous selection to pick from. Go on their website, or search for Whitethorn in your online shop of choice, grab a download code, and give hours of playable fun. Whitethorn specializes in "pleasant, cozy games that can be played in pieces," that don't come with the high price tags that some tentpole platformers typically carry. If you know someone who is already enamored with a Whitethorn game, go to their website for a great selection of enamel pins, t-shirts, and more. // [whitethorndigital.com](http://whitethorndigital.com)

## Scented Candles from Wicks & Wax



One of the star players from Gone Local, Wicks & Wax offers an interactive experience in addition to their more traditional gifts. Located on Edinboro Road in McKean, the site lets visitors pour their own candles to take home with them, open to walk-ins, small groups, and private parties. If you aren't as inclined to drop by, their site offers over 60 different scents to choose from, letting you choose your own lid type for an even more personal touch. Each candle is made from natural plant oil, with their wax sustainable, as part of the Round Table on Responsible Soy. // [wicksandwaxerie.com](http://wicksandwaxerie.com)

## Fresh Baked Bread or Donuts



Just imagine waking up on Christmas morning to some fresh, locally made bread or donuts. Virtually any time during the holiday season and beyond is the right time to bring home some well-risen confections. Think outside the stocking this year, and grab a loaf from a place like The Majestic Bakery or The Workingman's Cake (they even deliver it courtesy of Gone Local), or a dozen from a much-loved location like Mighty Fine, Jack Frost, or H&K.

## Handmade Recycled Paper from Grounded Print Shop



Have an artist on your list? Give them a one-of-a-kind arena for their work with some handmade recycled paper. Founded by artist Ashley Pastore in 2019, the products made by Grounded Print Shop are eye-catching unto themselves, filled with amazing textures and coming in captivating colors. Their Etsy shop has handmade notebooks, masks, and a variety of 5" x 7" paper bundles — perfect for making your own holiday cards or unforgettable thank you notes. Located on Cherry Street in Erie's Little Italy, the shop also offers classes for pulp painting, papermaking, and book binding. // [groundedprintshop.com](http://groundedprintshop.com)

## Bath Bombs from Dragonfly Lake Scents



Have you or someone you loved ever used a bath bomb? If so, then you know how amazing they are in all their fizzy, frothy glory. Rather than grab one from a flush national chain, grab them directly from Erie's bath and body experts, Dragonfly Lake Scents. Check out their Etsy shop and just try not to pick up a brilliant-looking bar of handmade soap as well. Run by Tenise Monterio and Mioshee Greer, Dragonfly has made a

## FEATURE

name for itself for being one of Erie's top artisanal makers. Also available are masks, balms, muscle soaks, body butters, and more. // [etsy.com/shop/DragonflyLakeScents](https://etsy.com/shop/DragonflyLakeScents)

### SleepPhones from AcousticSheep



FB@SLEEPPHONES

Have a restless sleeper on your list? One of Erie's most praised gifts for years just might be the answer. AcousticSheep's SleepPhones remain a remarkable invention. Founded in 2007 by Dr. Wei-Shin Lai and husband Jason Wolfe, SleepPhones are often imitated and never duplicated. Its flagship item is a comfortable, bed-friendly headband with specially designed ultra-slim headphones built between the headband's fabric. There's a variety to choose from, including some with Bluetooth or pre-loaded audio tracks (and a new ASMR edition), and newly improved battery life. // [sleepphones.com](https://sleepphones.com)

### Shirts from Local Makers



FB@ERIEAPPAREL

Want to look good and keep things local next year? There are all kinds of

great sources for t-shirts, hoodies, hats, and more made by Erie-area companies. There are hundreds upon hundreds of options to choose from. There's workout gear, loungewear, and of course, t-shirts. Choose from Erie-centric designs, or go with a more subtle nod to a brand you love. You can stop in to a brick-and-mortar store like Erie Apparel or Iron Empire, or an online shop like Dotigan or Melancholy.

### Wine, Beer, or Spirits



FB@FIVEAND20

There's a reason that alcohol is a perennial favorite on this list. The Erie area has so much to choose from. To certain people, a six pack with a bow around it will mean so much more than a tie ever could. Surprise craft beer enthusiasts with a small-batch run they haven't tried yet. Looking for an instantly-appreciated office gift (even if you work from home)? A bagged bottle or two of Lake Erie wine will work like gangbusters — you could even go extra-Christmasy with mulled wine or some ever-so-sweet ice wine. If Christmas spirits are something you want to take literally, a nice bottle from an area distillery is nearly unbeatable. Most offer t-shirt and merch options to boot. The options are flowing. // Get started at [lakeeriealetrail.com](https://lakeeriealetrail.com) or [lakeeriewinecountry.org](https://lakeeriewinecountry.org)

*Have your own idea for what you'd like to see on this list? Let us know! Nick Warren can be reached at [nick@eriereader.com](mailto:nick@eriereader.com)*

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# Handmade Tales

Three local creators share their paths to full-time success



[left]: Local painter Kaitlyn Page specializes in the stunningly psychedelic and surreal, selling her artwork in the form of stickers (pictured here), prints, and apparel. [bottom right] Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Page had found success vending (as the Inner Observer) at various music festivals throughout the area. Thankfully, social media and her online e-commerce store has allowed her to sustain herself as a full-time artist in the absence of in-person events.

By: Matt Swanseger

Each glass and handbags. Pottery and pet portraits. Windshield decals and woodwork. Earrings and urns. These are just a sampling of the items available from Erie-based Etsy sellers. As eclectic as these inventories may seem, their products do sell — sometimes by the thousands.

Still regarded by many as the stronghold of Internet arts and crafts (and facemasks in 2020), Etsy has lured in over 138 million unique buyers over its 15-year lifespan, with nearly 70 million active as of last quarter. Fueled predominantly by independent artists, artisans, and craftspeople, it has become the sixth-highest grossing e-commerce website in the United States (over \$6 billion in sales through three quarters this year) and 19th largest in the world.

If you're looking to shop small without leaving the house this holiday season, Etsy is a good place to start. Businesses don't get smaller than most Etsy Shops, which are generally owned and operated by one or two people (usually women) who handle all aspects of marketing, production, and distribution. Shops cost nothing whatsoever to set up — to generate revenue, Etsy charges a small listing fee for each item and skims a percentage off the top of each sale (currently 5 percent).

Despite Etsy's popularity, accessibility, and variety, by no means is it the be-all, end-all of artistry and e-commerce. In 2020, the avenues for buying or selling unique, personalized, customized, homemade, and/or handmade gifts (all

sought-after by Google Search users this time of year) online are many. According to three local women who've either partially or fully graduated from Etsy to running their own professional websites, the key is not painting yourself into a corner.

### Three artists, three stories

Katie LeVan, Kaitlyn Page, and Heather Cash are all full-time artists and Erie residents who have successfully found markets for their work online. Their artistic styles and journeys, however, are as individual as the women themselves. LeVan's paintings showcase flora, fauna, and sweeping and majestic landscapes. Page, who won the 2019 Best of Erie Award for Best Fine Artist, specializes in the stunningly and psychedelically surreal. Cash, a 2016 40 Under 40 alumna, commands a cast of cute critters that have charmed their way into the hearts of children and adults alike.

Here is what they had to say about how they made their dreams reality, and how you can too (or at least how you might discover other really cool, original gifts from creators locally and around the world. *Psst ... social media, interest groups, and online communities*).

**Matt Swanseger:** When did you first realize you were creating something that people wanted to buy? Had you always had the intent to sell or were you encouraged to do it?

**Katie LeVan:** I have been painting most of my life and pursued a degree in studio art from Mercyhurst Uni-

versity. As a graduating senior, I was part of a group show where I painted a bunch of birds. I have always felt that art can mean something, or it can mean nothing. It can simply be a statement of "this is what I want to paint in this moment, and that's enough of a reason to do it." To my surprise, I sold most of those birds that opening day. From that moment on, my artwork generated a small following that I have worked tirelessly to grow as I have grown.

**Kaitlyn Page:** When I originally began my journey as an artist, I had no real intent to sell my work. I was painting strictly for the enjoyment I got from it and I didn't see myself as working professionally in this field. It wasn't until my late teens (2014-ish), that I realized people were actually interested in purchasing what I was creating, whether that be an original painting, a commission, prints, etc.

**Heather Cash:** I was living in California, working as a programmer [for Google], and started painting just for the fun of it. I put some paintings up on Etsy just to see what would happen, and they sold within a week. It was so exciting that someone wanted to buy something that I made myself! From then on, I was hooked. I couldn't stop creating and listing [items] for sale.

**MS:** What channels or methods have you used to promote your work? Which approaches have worked for you, and which not so much?

**KL:** I opened up my own online shop outside of Etsy through Shopify at the beginning of 2020, which also marked the beginning of me becoming a full-time artist. Up until this year, I have sold locally at various markets, as well as a few out of town events, such as the Three Rivers Arts Festival in Pittsburgh. Alongside my years of doing in person art shows, I have focused on growing my social media following. I give out business cards to everyone, and try to direct as many people as possible to my Instagram or Facebook pages.

Instagram specifically has been a game changer for my artwork, especially when I started to be more conscious about the aesthetic and congruency







Local artist Katie LeVan's colorful and creative use of mixed media and soothing and majestic natural scenes have her wares a hot commodity on Etsy, motivating her to graduate to her own dedicated Shopify website (katielevan.com).

of what I'm posting. It is so easy to form solid relationships and interact with both artists and those who take an interest in my work through that platform. I do my advertising almost exclusively through Instagram, which generates most of my sales on my on-line store.

**KP:** In recent years, one of the best ways I've found to promote my work online is via Facebook groups. Most of my traffic comes from these groups and I tailor my posts to get the best exposure possible. A short post with a single image captures attention much better than a long post with multiple images. It's all about striking while the iron's hot, which is why when I finish a new piece, I post it to as many places as possible with links to pre-order prints.

Much of my original exposure was organic because people shared my work and others saw it, including people with much larger followings than

myself. I pushed my work on as many Facebook groups as possible, which is still what I do to this day. Instagram came into play later, after doing more research into algorithms and how to use hashtags. Today I use my Facebook Business page and Instagram as main channels to promote my paintings and merchandise.

**HC:** I find that word-of-mouth is the best promotion. Working with local businesses and nonprofits results in the best referrals for me. Facebook and Instagram are helpful, but I think every artist should have their own professional portfolio website. I know many people have found me through my website and it works out very well because they can easily browse through my full portfolio of work, as well as easily find contact information.

**MS:** Roughly what percentage of your sales are online? Has COVID had any effect?

**KL:** I would say at least 90 percent of my sales are online, especially since the beginning of 2020 when I started doing art full-time. I try to drop a new collection of artwork every month or two, generating interest in each collection

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HEATHERCASH.COM

Heather Cash started drawing and painting for the simple fun and joy of it. Once a Google programmer living in California, Cash now is active in art education and on both her Etsy shop and professional website, where she repurposes her "whimsical woodland art" into decals, stickers, luggage tags, bookmarks, greeting cards, and more.

er to the holiday season, as I have a lot of repeat customers buying gifts and those who find me through word of mouth. I know my artwork is on a lot of people's wish lists, which is such a wonderful and humbling feeling. I find that people are really drawn to my artwork because the materials I combine are different than what most people are used to.

**KP:** I believe my work stands out to a broad audience. Less than 25 percent of my online sales are local, with the majority coming from out of state. Most of these sales come from places like California, Colorado, and other areas on the West Coast. I also make quite a few sales internationally, with countries like the Netherlands, Canada, and the UK being the biggest buyers.

**HC:** A very small percentage of my buyers are local. I have some work for sale at Sparrow Gallery, and before COVID I would sell at a couple different festivals throughout the year. But I've always seemed to do better at selling my products online. I get sales from all over the world, even Europe and Australia!

**MS:** I've always wondered how you put a price on art. How do you reconcile creativity as a commodity? Have you had to make any compromises as

you've scaled up?

**KL:** Being an artist, you continuously have to navigate the challenges of your self-worth being tied to your ability to make a living off of both your productivity and things deeply connected to your soul. It can become very hard to part with pieces that you become so close to. Personally, I've found that gratitude has helped me to navigate through some of these difficult feelings. I am eternally grateful anytime someone wants what is essentially a piece of my heart to be something that becomes a part of their home. This keeps me grounded no matter what kind of sales I'm bringing in. Even one sale is still so meaningful to the maker. The only compromises I've had to make are with my time. I work extremely hard and have very little free time, but I am so grateful for the ability to create something unique within that space.

**KP:** It's evolving all the time. Prices for my originals have nearly doubled within a year's time. This is due to several factors, including supply and demand, others informing me that I should charge more, and simply how much someone will pay for something. Most of my original work now sells before it is even finished. It's what the market will bear. As more people have taken interest in my work, prices have risen to accompany this demand.

Time and detail also play a factor. When I first started out I based my prices solely on an hourly wage. As things grew, I started taking the size of the painting into account. Now I base my prices off the amount of detail and

with progress shots. When COVID hit, I wanted the space I take up on the Internet to be one that could be beneficial to others. I tend to be a very anxious person who has learned a lot of coping mechanisms over my years of overthinking. One of those was to watch process or time lapse videos of artwork being made, so I began to record and post everything I was making. Since doing this, I have been able to fully sell out collections in one weekend.

**KP:** At the present moment, over 90 percent of my sales are online. Last year I began vending at music festivals, and while that showed a lot of potential, it was unfortunately cut short by the emergence of COVID. I wasn't able to explore the world of vending again this year and I've already faced the fact that I might not be able to next year

either. My online sales soared when quarantine went into effect and have roughly stayed the same since.

**HC:** Before COVID, about a quarter of the money I made was from online sales through Etsy. The other three-quarters was from teaching classes and commissioned work. Since COVID hit, however, my online sales have skyrocketed. Now I make all my money through Etsy. I've also been expanding my online sales to a few different other sites, like Teachers Pay Teachers (classroom resources) and RedBubble (print-on-demand).

**MS:** Roughly what percentage of your buyers are local? Have you been able to stand out to a broader audience?

**KL:** It tends to change with the seasons. During most of the year, maybe 5 to 10 percent of my buyers are local. This percentage jumps as we get clos-

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time rather than size. A smaller painting doesn't necessarily mean cheaper because I can still put just as much time and effort into a smaller piece as a larger piece. In fact, sometimes smaller pieces are even more difficult because I still work in the same detail-oriented fashion.

**HC:** It's definitely hard to price my work. I find it helpful to search online for others selling similar products, and try to use that as a baseline. Oftentimes I'll find that I was going to price my products for less than I should have! One thing I've found that helps is creating prints of my artwork. In the beginning, I only wanted to sell original, one-of-a-kind art, and not create prints. However, I've found it to be much more practical to scan in my artwork and create prints, cards, and bookmarks to sell. It means that a single piece of art can create so much more profit than just selling the original work would make — and you reach a much wider audience. Also, it's so satisfying to sell a print of a piece of art you made years ago — because the work is already done, and you're still profiting off of it! You just print out the artwork and mail it out, and you're done!

**MS:** What advice would you give to someone trying to make a living as an artist?

**KL:** Being an artist can be ugly and difficult, but you can do it, whatever "it" is. Explore, learn, grow, and for the love of everything *please* do not diminish yourself for anyone else. You are gold and I believe in you. You and only you can determine what your path is, and you absolutely don't need everything to be perfect to start walking down that path.

**KP:** Practice, practice, practice! In order to make it as an artist, don't expect success to come overnight. You must first refine your techniques and be inspired by your craft. Draw everyday, live your art, make creativity a priority in your life. Once you have the basics down and feel ready to start selling, try different avenues and find what works best for you. Focus on the details and don't get wrapped up in just trying to promote yourself. Create new and innovative work that captures the imagination of those around you. Create things that make people *feel* something, even if that feeling is a less than desired one. If you stand out amongst the crowd, people will start to notice. But in order to do this, it all starts with passion! Don't lose

yourself to the idea of marketing.

**HC:** My main advice would be to not give up. It took me years to become fully financially dependent on my art. Don't just list 10 items on Etsy and then decide no one is buying them and give up — keep creating, constantly, and keep adding products. I have over 500 products in my Etsy Shop right now. You really need to have a lot of products in order to get seen amidst all the other sellers.

Also, don't put all your eggs in one basket. Find other ways to make money, like creating YouTube videos, creating print-on-demand products, teaching ... that way, when one avenue goes south, the other ones can pick up the slack. Lastly, don't ever think you're not good enough. There will always be people better than you. But, if you create enough products, you will make sales. Don't ask me how — there are tons of artists with better stuff than mine on Etsy — but somehow, people still buy my products. So just ignore those other people that you think are better than you — you can still be successful no matter what your skill level.

**Discover more**

Please do not ignore our featured artists or their peers — their stuff is pretty cool.

**Katie LeVan artist website:** [katielevan.com](http://katielevan.com)

**Katie's local picks:** Caelin McDaniel Pottery [mcdanielpottery.com](http://mcdanielpottery.com), Hypothetical Horror (typewritten poetry and collages, currently on hiatus)

**Kaitlyn Page artist website:** [kaitlynpage.storenvy.com](http://kaitlynpage.storenvy.com)

**Kaitlyn's local picks:** Mercy Maclay (watercolors and inks) [instagram.com/\\_mercymaclayart](http://instagram.com/_mercymaclayart), Nate Gillies (graphic artist and cartoonist) [facebook.com/Lawnsters](http://facebook.com/Lawnsters), Leslie Hess (tattoo artist) [andromedaerie.com](http://andromedaerie.com), Douglas Bailey (reclaimed wood pieces and cutouts) [bailey814.bigcartel.com](http://bailey814.bigcartel.com), Katie LeVan (see above)

**Heather Cash artist website:** [heathercash.com](http://heathercash.com)

**Heather's local picks:** Leanne Nipps (moody and spooky art and photography) [leannenipps.wixsite.com/dark-edgert](http://leannenipps.wixsite.com/dark-edgert), Cathryn Stranahan (Ravenmaid Creative) [cathrynstranahan.com](http://cathrynstranahan.com)

*Matt Swanseger (mswanseger@eriereader.com) currently has no art for sale, but can be commissioned for fully improvised finger-painting and stick person drawings on a limited basis.*

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# Rivers and Roads: Discovering the Covered Bridges of Ashtabula County

Cross the Ohio border into the charming, rustic past



[left] Ashtabula County, Erie County's western neighbor in Ohio, is home to a total of 19 covered bridges, including the Root Road Bridge in Kingsville, built in 1868 and restored in 1982. [bottom right] The Olin Bridge in Ashtabula County is named for the family who has owned the property on which it stands for more than 150 years.

this project: Why cover a bridge? Back when many of these bridges were built, in the mid to late 1800s, the most readily available resource was timber. And, while wood was plentiful, "wood, by its very nature, must go the way of flesh rather than bone" states author Carl Feather in his comprehensive book *The Covered Bridges of Ashtabula County*. When wood is exposed to moisture, freezing, heat, etc. it will decay, no matter how strongly the bridge is built. The purpose of the roof in a timber frame bridge, therefore, is mainly for protection, and to increase the bridge's longevity. Some in the past speculated on other purposes, including keeping livestock calm while crossing a raging river or as a respite of shelter while traveling during the horse and buggy days. Obviously, nowadays, there are much more durable materials to use, but the charm of the covered bridge lives on.

ERIN PHILLIPS

By: Erin Phillips

My dad's first new car was a 1973 MG-B convertible, dark red with a silver racing stripe and black interior. Many of my childhood memories involve this car, and I can still picture it perfectly. The smell of the inside of the garage it sat in over the winter: a mix of leaded gasoline, leather, and old wood. I remember sitting in the front seat (long before I should have been allowed) and looking at the magnets on the glove box advertising the Sports Car Club of America Covered Bridge Rally of 1975 and 1976, and I imagine my young parents adventuring in their cool car, racing through the back country roads and across the covered bridges of Erie and Ashtabula County. Now, eight months into a pandemic, the number of activities I feel comfortable participating in dwindles. I feel like I am at the perfect moment in my life to take a break from my omnipresent work-at-home husband, wild toddler, and remote-learning 3rd grader, to take a drive and experience those bridges that my parents enjoyed some 45 years ago, and that the people of Ashtabula County have been enjoying for generations.

Erie County has only two remaining covered bridges (Neimeyer Road in Waterford built in 1875 and the Sherman Covered Bridge in Albion built in 1870) and both are currently under construction and restoration. However, our neighboring county to the west has managed to hold onto most of their covered bridges, and has used their popularity as an economic boon. Many, if not most, of the covered bridges in Ashtabula were either constructed or restored in the 1980s under the vision and supervision of former county engineer John Smolen. At the time, the rural county of Ashtabula was in a major economic down-

turn, and in examining what resources the county had to offer, Smolen made the decision and the county (and in some cases, the federal government) made the financial investment to shore up its bridges to draw tourists to the area. The plan paid off, as Ashtabula is now known as the covered bridge capital of Ohio. It touts 19 bridges in total, including the longest covered bridge in the United States (named for the one who conceived it: the Smolen-Gulf Bridge), which was built in 2006.

You may be asking yourself, as I did when I began

And so, on a crisp Sunday morning in autumn, I leave my family behind and set out for the longest amount of time I have been away from them since the start of the pandemic (insert mind-blown emoji here). I've got a Yeti full of coffee and Guided by Voices playing in between the GPS instructions in a much less interesting car than my parents, but it feels good to hit the road, see some beautiful fall scenery, and learn about a county so close by it seems crazy I hadn't realized all it held before now.

Very early on into Ashtabula County, I come upon



ERIN PHILLIPS



After suffering major economic decline, Ashtabula County branded itself the “covered bridge capital of Ohio” to draw tourism to the area, with concerted restoration efforts in the 1980s. Exploring them would make for a great socially-distanced day trip as weather permits.

three horse-drawn carriages working their way down the road and I feel as though I’ve just driven back in time, which is a feeling that continues as I work my way deeper into the county. The first bridge I find is one of the newer bridges that sparked the beginning of the covered bridge revival in Ashtabula: The State Road Covered Bridge. It is huge and beautiful, situated over Conneaut Creek. There is a parking area with public access to the creek and forest below, which allows a great opportunity to take in sweeping views of the bridge. You could spend all day right here, it’s so picturesque and expansive, but I stay for just a few minutes: the rest of the bridges are calling.

The next bridge I find is the Root Road Bridge in Kingsville. Upon reflection after my drive, this bridge is my favorite. This is what you picture when you think of an old covered bridge. It has it all. Weathered whitewash, gaps between the creaking floor beams, random piles of horse manure surrounded by autumn leaves, goldenrod and aster, with no sounds but the birds and the Ashtabula River beneath you. The Root Road bridge was built in 1868 and underwent extensive restoration in 1982. This bridge has the kind of oldness that can give you chills, in its simple beauty and in the thought of all the history that has gone on through and around it.

I make my way around the county and find a few more beautiful old bridges. One, the old Graham Road Bridge, is no longer functional, but during the bridge preservation effort in the 1980s, it was set down on the land of the grandson of one of the original builders of the bridge. John Benson’s grandfather

helped build the bridge in 1913 and it was moved to land on their property after the county decided that the bridge needed to be replaced for safety. It is now a park attraction and venue, with benches and tables for picnics, and a beautiful, historic backdrop for weddings and other events.

I head back up towards the lake and hit a few more bridges before I head east back to Pennsylvania. The Benetka Road Bridge was built on the site of an old grist mill that was constructed in 1829. There were likely other bridges built over the mill-stream but most believe the current bridge to have been constructed around 1900. According to Carl Feather’s book, there are timbers in the bridge that have two different kinds of saw marks: circular saw marks and well as vertical marks, likely made by sash saws powered by the mill. This indicates that those timbers were hewn around 1860 or earlier, suggesting that the bridge was built then, and rebuilt more towards the turn of the century. The county also restored this bridge in the 1980s. Be aware that the curving, south approach to the bridge has a blind spot. Locals know to keep their vehicle’s horn upon approach.

The Olin Bridge on Dewey Road is a picturesque old one, built in 1873 and spanning a particularly scenic section of the Ashtabula River. The Olin Bridge is named for the family who has owned the property for more than 150 years. Connections to this land for the Olin family go back to at least 1850, when Almon Olin was born in a log cabin on the river. And given the overwhelming beauty of the landscape, it is not surprising that his descendants stayed.

As I make my way back to I-90, I make one final stop at the Creek Road Bridge. As I approach, I notice some other travelers with a covered bridge map in hand. As I get out of my car to walk around, I greet the two middle-aged women and teenage boy. “You’re all alone?” one woman says. “Yes, but I have two little kids at home,” I reply. “Say no more! You need to get out!” they laugh. They tell me they live on the Ohio border close to Indiana and they were looking for something fun to do that didn’t involve being around many people. And they decided to get to know some unique parts of their own state. They ask me how to pronounce “Conneaut” and are amazed at the answer.

This final bridge spans Conneaut Creek and has multiple trailheads and places to park and picnic. It strikes me that we all have an opportunity right now, as we try to find ways to get out and have fun that are safe and socially distant. You can do like I did, and as this family has: get to know a little bit more about where you live and who lived there before you. Ashtabula is just a few miles to our west, but driving these dirt roads alongside horses and passing over covered bridges that have been there for 150 years, it is like driving straight into the past. Go alone. Go with family. Just go and discover and enjoy the fall and the beauty that lives in our part of the world that has previously gone unnoticed. And, if you can, be sure to take a cool classic convertible.

*A complete list and map of all the covered bridges in Ashtabula can be found at the website: [www.coveredbridgefestival.org](http://www.coveredbridgefestival.org)*



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# Learning and Living on the Airwaves

WQLN steps up to the plate for Erie



PBS LEARNING AT HOME

By: Mary Birdsong

At some point in March, every business, nonprofit organization, and person had to come to grips with the changing public landscape brought on by COVID-19. While the average person thought about toilet paper and acquiring groceries, businesses faced a lack of customers, possible layoffs, and uncertain supply chains.

WQLN Public Media was no different. For them, it meant that their many community activities and fundraisers were now canceled. No Brewfest, Gears to Beers, Christmas Craft Show, or bus trips to theater events. And while raising funds is crucial to keeping WQLN radio and TV on the air, staff quickly realized that their mission “to stimulate, enrich, educate, and entertain the public” came first. They set about looking for how they could help the community.

First up was education. Kathy Woodard, WQLN education outreach manager, tells me that “COVID-19 immediately revealed enormous equity issues in our education system. Recognizing that many students in our community do not have access to the Internet, the sole medium to reach nearly 100 percent of our students is broadcast TV. It’s free over the air, and, most areas, does not require an antenna for access.”

In response, a program called Learning at Home was created. It contains a comprehensive catalog of educational programming available on broadcast TV, strengthened with additional online resources for teachers and families. “It has become a bridge to distance learn-

ing opportunities while staying safe at home,” she adds.

WQLN also created WQLN Homeroom as a part of Learning at Home. WQLN PBS partnered with school districts and the Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit to connect with numerous Pre-K to Grade 6 teachers across our community.

Those teachers then recorded lessons from home in the content areas of language arts, math, science, social studies, and other specialty topics. The lessons were recorded early during the pandemic and can be accessed any time at [wqln.org](http://wqln.org). WQLN PBS’s goal is to record new lessons sometime in the near future.

The statewide system of public broadcasting went further with this idea. Thanks to a new partnership formed between all seven Pennsylvania PBS stations and the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Learning at Home programming now reaches across the state, with all stations airing educational programming for Pre-K to 12th grade during the week from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. All instructional units are additionally paired with curriculum-aligned resources and activities. According to Woodard, “Teachers can print and distribute these resources to parents to supplement their child’s education, while learning at home.”

Not all students can receive curriculum via data-based technology, however. Rural, remote, or mountainous areas still have difficulty getting Internet access.

The PA DOE and PA PBS is addressing that issue with an initiative called Connected to Learning. Through this project, families who need technological assistance will be able to acquire a

**The Learning at Home initiative is one way Erie PBS affiliate WQLN Public Media (and lovable Muppet Grover) is helping kids reach toward the stars, even with in-person schooling shut down. It offers area residents access to a comprehensive educational programming catalog and additional online resources free of charge.**

receiver that hooks up to an outdoor antenna that allows them access to curriculum that can be used in a wi-fi enabled computer, even without a data signal. This one-way system will give educators the ability to provide specific assignments to students with details about projects that need to be completed and how the work is to be returned. According to the PA PBS website “Any type of file (.jpg, .pdf, .mp4, etc.) can be transmitted via datacasting. This means that the possibilities of creating and packaging content designed for instruction are limitless.”

The program is being rolled out in phases, with several already implemented. All PBS stations now have access to PBS learning media, and the datacasting infrastructure was completed last month. The PA DOE is now finalizing which school districts will participate in pilot programs.

The pilot will allow stakeholders to learn how long it may take for a file to download in different areas, establish best practices for end-user equipment, allow educators and administrators to streamline what and how students will see when they receive the files, and sort out models for returning completed work/assignments to a teacher.

The 29 Intermediate Units in the state will work with each school district to distribute receivers to the families who need them. It is anticipated that the entire state will be connected soon, maybe as early as December.

But not all education is book learning. Realizing that regional high school seniors would have no opportunities for recognition at graduation ceremonies, WQLN reached out to every school district in Erie, Crawford, and Warren Counties to collect photographs of their seniors. In special broadcasts on July 4 and 5, they saluted each graduate by airing their photos along with music and a keynote address from former governor Tom Ridge. They also used graduation addresses from Henry Louis Gates Jr.,

Tom Hanks, and the on-air team from *PBS Newshour*.

WQLN’s mission was still not complete in these unprecedented times, though. Public events were being canceled left and right and the region’s cultural opportunities were declining by the day.

So when the Erie Philharmonic’s entire season was in jeopardy of being canceled due to the pandemic, WQLN collaborated with it to broadcast concerts for free to homes throughout the region.

Anyone can now enjoy concerts on select Thursday evenings at 8 p.m. or watch a rebroadcast the following Sunday at 2 p.m. Remaining in this season’s lineup is “Americana” on Nov. 19 and 22, and “A Holiday Special” on Dec. 17 and 20.

Concerts may also be viewed via livestream at [wqln.org/eriephil](http://wqln.org/eriephil), and previous concerts can also be viewed from archives at both the Erie Philharmonic and WQLN websites.

But what about fundraising and keeping the nonprofit afloat with no revenue coming in? According to station manager Tom New, WQLN was fortunate to receive a Small Business Association Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loan through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. In addition, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting — the steward of the federal government’s investment in public broadcasting — also received funding through CARES and shared it with their member television and radio stations.

This has helped WQLN and many other public media nonprofits keep the lights on and the programming moving forward. In fact, the pandemic may have powerfully revealed how valuable public broadcasting is to the community.

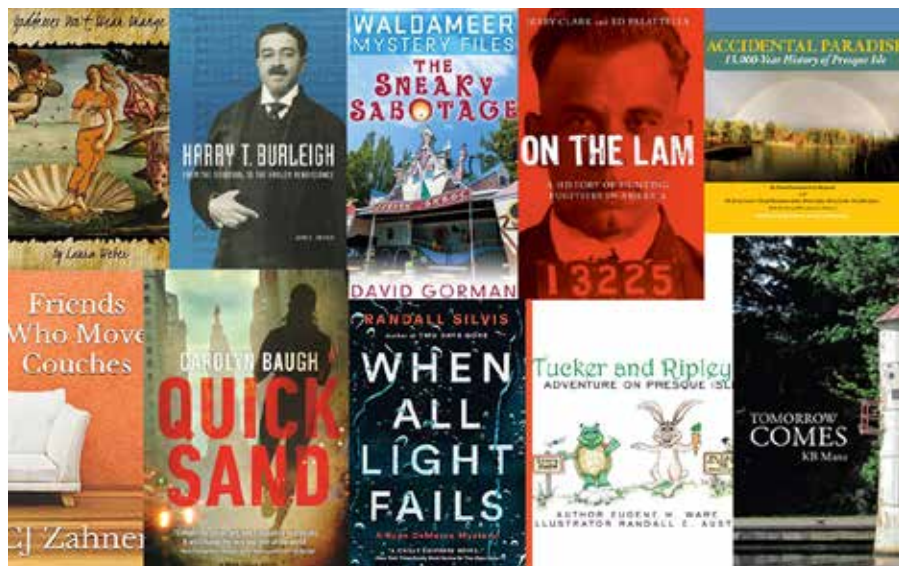
New says it may lead to once again receiving funding from Pennsylvania, something that was eliminated for all public broadcasting in 2008. “We are hoping to demonstrate a need for our services, which may help us regain a place in the state’s budget.”

With the current resurgence of COVID-19 in our community and around the country, public media outlets like WQLN have proven their worth, and demonstrated that this public-based initiative has the best interest of the community at heart. Truly a comfort in these trying times.

Mary Birdsong can be reached at [mbirdsong@eriereader.com](mailto:mbirdsong@eriereader.com)

## 10 Local Books to Add to Your Christmas List

Dog ear these works by Erie-area authors



By: Ally Kutz

The holiday season can be stressful for many reasons, with the question of what to buy for our friends and family near the top of the list. Books are the perfect gift to give when it comes to choosing something both inexpensive and heartfelt for those on your shopping list.

With the COVID-19 pandemic still making its way through the country, many are turning to local sources for services, entertainment, and gift ideas. Buying books by Erie authors is the perfect way to “shop local” and support the area’s treasure trove of talent. Here are 10 of the best local books to check out this holiday season.

### Waldameer Mystery Files Series

By David Gorman (Dog Ear Publishing, 2016, 2017, & coming in 2020)

In this children’s series about the beloved Erie amusement park, siblings Seth and Julia Ambrose along with their friends Tyren and Anh set off around Waldameer & Waterworld and the city to solve mysteries together. Starting with *The Long-Lost Locket* and *The Sneaky Sabotage*, the series is set to release another installment, *The Curious Clues*, sometime before year’s end. Perfect for kids and adults alike, the Waldameer Mystery Files series is the ideal combination of detective work and childhood nostalgia. // Children’s Books // [waldameermystery-files.com](http://waldameermystery-files.com)

### The Detective Nora Khalil Series

By Carolyn Baugh (MacMillan Publishers, 2015 & 2017)

Egyptian-American FBI agent Nora Khalil is part of a joint task force with the Philadelphia Police Department, working to

keep gang violence off the streets while also working to keep her professional and personal lives separate. In *Quicksand*, this line is blurred when she must use her cultural background to decipher whether a body discovered in a rough part of town is gang-related or something more sinister. In *Shoreline*, Nora relocates to the Erie FBI office where she fights to disband a group of domestic terrorists before their destruction gets out of hand and becomes a national threat. // Fiction // [carolynbaugh.com](http://carolynbaugh.com)

### Friends Who Move Couches

By C.J. Zahner (Self Published, 2020)

In this hilarious and heartwarming story, Nikki Grey is an average neighborhood wife and mother whose main concerns are her workaholic husband, her rebellious children, and feuding with the families on the other side of the fence. But when smoking marijuana brings to light a lifelong but dormant medical condition, Nikki loses her driver’s license and ends up stuck in her home. In an attempt to regain her friends on the block, Nikki further muddies her relationships, becoming the joke of the neighborhood. Ultimately, Nikki seeks to find the answer to one burning question: who should she keep in her life and who should she kick to the curb? // Fiction, Memoir // [cyndiezahner.com](http://cyndiezahner.com) // Order at [pressedbooks.com](http://pressedbooks.com)

### On the Lam: A History of Hunting Fugitives in America

By Ed Palattella and Jerry Clark (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019)

From the authors of *Pizza Bomber: The Untold Story of America’s Most Shocking Bank Robbery* and *Mania and Marjorie Diehl-Armstrong: Inside the Mind of a Female Serial Killer* comes a chronicle of fugitives in

America and the significance they have in the American criminal justice system’s history. Clark and Palattella examine both real and fictional characters and the parts they have played in shaping institutions such as the FBI and practices like bail systems and most-wanted programs. // Nonfiction // Order at [pressedbooks.com](http://pressedbooks.com)

### Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance

By Jean E. Snyder (University of Illinois Press, 2016)

In this comprehensive look at the triumph and successes of Erie native Harry T. Burleigh, Snyder delves into lesser-known aspects of the composer’s life. From a Pennsylvania childhood to tenure as a soloist in Manhattan, Burleigh strongly influenced American song and helped pave the way for African American musicians during an era riddled with race and class issues. // Nonfiction // Order at [pressedbooks.com](http://pressedbooks.com)

### Can’t Take Back Yesterday & Tomorrow Comes

By KB Manz (BookBaby 2015 & Lulu Publishing Services 2016)

*Can’t Take Back Yesterday* tells the story of Lucas Fielding, an 18-year-old who overhears an argument between his parents that reveals a shocking secret that sets everything into motion. Accidental murders, a suicide, and other tragedies begin to occur, but Lucas only knows part of the actual secret. *Tomorrow Comes* details the impact the secrets kept have on all those affected by the aftermath of the truth being revealed. // Fiction, Mystery // Order at [pressedbooks.com](http://pressedbooks.com)

### Tucker and Ripley’s Adventure on Presque Isle

By Eugene H. Ware (Outskirts Press, 2019)

Tucker Turtle and Ripley Rabbit decide on a sunny summer morning that they want to meet the many different animals, birds, and insects that live in Presque Isle State Park. The book takes readers on a journey through the peninsula to 25 different places throughout the park while also introducing the animals that live there. Perfect for both children and adults, this book expertly blends educational elements with fun illustrations. Be sure to look for some hidden gems throughout the book, including worms racing and a guitar-playing mouse. // Children’s Books // Order at [pressedbooks.com](http://pressedbooks.com)

### The Ryan DeMarco Mystery Series

By Randall Silvis (Poisoned Pen Press, 2017-2021)

The Ryan DeMarco Mystery Series comprises four published books — *Two Days Gone*, *Walking the Bones*, *A Long Way Down*, and *No Woods So Dark as These* — with a fifth, *When All Light Fails*, set for release in August 2021. The series follows Sergeant Ryan DeMarco as he navigates mysteries and murders that crop up in his line of work. Beginning with the murders of a beloved college professor’s family in *Two Days Gone*, DeMarco investigates both new and old cases, attempting to bring justice for those who have been wronged. // Fiction, Mystery // [randallsilvis.com](http://randallsilvis.com)

### Goddesses Don’t Wear Orange

By Laura Weber (Self Published, 2018)

Florence’s boyfriend winds up dead after dumping her and, after failing to convince a jury that she did not kill him, she finds herself an inmate at Coffee Correctional Facility. Her only hope at regaining her freedom is through the Rehabilitation Seminars, a mysterious program that will take her deeper into the past that she is desperately trying to hide from. Mixed with her unrequited love for the prison janitor and attention from a stranger, Florence thinks she can survive the year...as long as she doesn’t find something that will make her question any basic expectations she has about herself and the world. // Fiction, Novel // Order at [pressedbooks.com](http://pressedbooks.com)

### Accidental Paradise: 13,000-Year History of Presque Isle

By David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak (Jefferson Educational Society

Publications in cooperation with the Tom Ridge Environmental Center Foundation, 2020)

Compelling narrative and hundreds of full-color images of Presque Isle, the jewel of Pennsylvania’s state park system, arrive just in time to celebrate Presque Isle’s 100th anniversary as a state park in 2021. Features geological formation of the peninsula, natural history, and colorful political history highlighting people, events, and roles played by Erie’s peninsula to the present day. Included is naval history, ecology, beaches, Presque Isle Lighthouse, Perry Monument, TREC, Gull Point, Waldameer Park, the flirtation with steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, the forerunners of the U.S. Coast Guard, and much more. // Nonfiction // [jeserie.org](http://jeserie.org), [trecf.org](http://trecf.org)



## No 'Bah, Humbug!' With *Dash & Lily*

The new Netflix original series brings holiday cheer that even Scrooges can get behind



ALISONCOHEN/ROSA/NETFLIX

I love Christmas as much — if not more — than the next person, but this year hasn't exactly fostered the holiday cheer I'm used to feeling post-Halloween. *Dash & Lily*, however, was a complete game-changer that propelled me into the Christmas mood.

Cynical, Christmas-loathing Dash (Austin Abrams of *Chemical Hearts*, *Paper Towns*) finds a notebook titled "Do You Dare...?" hidden in the stacks at his favorite bookstore, The Strand, in New York City the week before Christmas. The notebook is left by Christmas-lov-

The Netflix original series *Dash & Lily* strikes the perfect balance between reality and the Hallmark Channel style of storybook romance, proving itself capable of injecting much-needed holiday cheer into your watch queues.

ing Lily (Midori Francis of *Good Boys*, *Ocean's 8*) in the hopes of finding someone brave enough to take on the dares. This event kicks off a whirlwind romance between the two, as they exchange not only dares, but also secrets, hopes, and dreams between the notebook's pages.

Lily's dares bring out the best in Dash, showing him that the holiday season can truly be magical, while Dash's dares show Lily that acknowledging and feeling negative emotions instead of hiding them is a necessary part of life. The romance is not without its ups and downs, though. Dash's ex-girlfriend Sofia (Keana Marie) moves back to the city with plans of rekindling their relationship, even though he has drastically changed in the year since she left. Lily's family

is stern but loving, requiring her to lie and sneak around to complete some of her dares. Additionally, there are times when it seems Dash and Lily are not who the other thought they were through the pages of the notebook.

With characters having depth and substance that breaks from typical rom-com tropes, *Dash & Lily* doesn't feel forced as too cheery or too depressing like many holiday-themed shows. Instead, it is the perfect balance between reality and guilty-pleasure Hallmark-esque holiday movies, making it a show perfect for the masses.

Filled with laughter, romance, and a heartbreak or two, *Dash & Lily* will make even the most Scrooge-like among us crack a smile and believe in the spirit of the holidays, even if only for a moment. — Ally Kutz

Season One currently streaming on Netflix // Created by: Joe Tracz // Based on the book series by: Rachel Cohn and David Levithan // Starring: Austin Abrams, Midori Francis, Dante Brown, and Troy Iwata // Eight episodes

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## TELEVISION

### The Queen's Gambit is a Moving Piece About Moving Pieces



NETFLIX

Netflix miniseries is certainly one to check out

Years ago I was watching a behind-the-scenes about the making of *Amadeus*, the 1984 Academy Award winner for Best Picture. There is a scene where Mozart's frenemy and rival Salieri takes his musical dictation for the Requiem Mass, the two laboring over the composition of the intricate piece for hours. One of the filmmakers remarked how it seemed crazy to include in the film a scene that is literally just two men engaged in the act of composition, speaking nothing but the language of music between them.

I was thinking of this as I watched Beth Harmon, rendered into life by an exquisite Anya Taylor-Joy, sink opponent after (male) opponent at the chessboard in the new Netflix limited series *The Queen's Gambit*.

It is a veritable enchantment, by way of both the cast performances and the well-plotted pacing of this coming-of-age story, with its themes of feminism, sexism, addiction and the loneliness of genius, dotted by the miniature wars that play out on the chessboards, as precisely choreographed as any large-scale battle sequence.

*The Queen's Gambit* was created by Scott Frank and Allan Scott, based on a 1983 novel of the same name, with every one of the seven episodes written and directed by Scott. It opens on Elizabeth Harmon, the daughter of an entirely absent father and a mentally ill math professor mother who takes her own life, landing Beth in an orphanage. Here she makes a friend, Jolene, and first encounters her life's twin obsessions: tranquilizer pills and chess.

The first episode is set mainly in the orphanage and moves forward in time with a confident, assured pace. We see teenage Beth adopted, forming a surprisingly warm and understanding relationship with her new mother, Alma Wheatley (played with sage resignation by an excellent Marielle

Heller, director of *Can You Ever Forgive Me?*). Yet Beth's dependency on tranquilizer pills — plus excessive binge-drinking — deepens, following her ambition to chess tournaments all around the world, where her undeniably prodigious brilliance is stopped by players of perhaps lesser natural talent but greater erudition, vision, and focus (for example, grown-up Thomas Brodie-Sangster playing a chess cowboy and mentor, Benny Watts).

Yet for all the glossy, sophisticated fashion (the dresses! the hair scarves!), immersive set design, smart dialogue and briskly triumphant expositional scenes of Beth's wins, the most entrancing moments involve steady, settled-in matches between Beth and her opponents, face-to-face, silently speaking the language of elite chess masters, as their hands weave around the board in contradictorily thrilling movements. The power of these well-crafted scenes lies in the soundtrack and Taylor-Joy's expressive eyes, which somehow convey everything an uninformed audience needs to know.

"It's so much more exciting than I imagined," Mrs. Wheatley enthuses after Beth wins a final tournament match.

*The Queen's Gambit* isn't without its flaws, but Mrs. Wheatley has the right of it: in the tradition of *Amadeus*, I watched Beth Harmon's genius at work, transfixed, with the same enthusiasm normally reserved for Steelers fans on Sundays. — Cara Suppa

Currently streaming now on Netflix // Created by: Scott Frank and Allan Scott // Based on the book by Walter Tevis // Starring: Anya Taylor-Joy, Bill Camp, Moses Ingram, Isla Johnston, Christiane Seidel, Rebecca Root, Chloe Pirrie, Akemnji Ndiforinyen, Marielle Heller, Harry Melling, Patrick Kennedy, Jacob Fortune-Lloyd, Thomas Brodie-Sangster, and Marcin Dorociński // Seven episodes

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## Our Hand-picked Podcast Favorites This Month

Enthralling audio for the streaming generation

### Bananas

Hosted by: Kurt Braunohler and Scotty Landes  
Comedy, Chat Show

In a world where the news is constantly at our fingertips and in our ears, it can be difficult to escape the dread and anxiety that comes with it. But, if you're looking to add a bit of humor to your weekly news consumption, look no further than the *Bananas* podcast on the Exactly Right Network. Hosted by comedians and writers Kurt Braunohler (*The Big Sick*, *Bob's Burgers*) and Scotty Landes (*Workaholics*, *Ma*), *Bananas* gathers eccentric, intriguing, and downright unbelievable news stories from around the world. With guests including actress Kristen Schaal, musician Phoebe Bridgers, and professional basketball player Sue Bird, Braunohler and Landes bring their comedic genius to the already hilarious headlines and stories. Each episode features a handful or two of peculiar headlines, but Braunohler, Landes, and their guests' real-life experiences are what make this podcast a laugh-out-loud success. Ridiculous headlines range from "Florida couple's picnic ruined by guacamole-stealing alligator" to "Detained 'drug smuggler' cat escapes Sri Lanka prison" to "Apparently, you can buy arms for your chickens." With no shortage of weird and wacky headlines both old and new from around the world, you'll be sure to say, "That's Bananas!" at least once each episode.

— Ally Kutz



EXACTLY RIGHT PODCAST NETWORK

### Little Gold Men

Hosted by: Michael Hogan, Katey Rich, Richard Lawson, Joanna Robinson  
Movies, Oscars

With the Oscars being pushed to April 2021, you'd think *Little Gold Men*, Vanity Fair's elevated yet unpretentious podcast about Hollywood's award season, would sputter.

Instead, the episodes seemingly designed to fill time this fall have often been the most entertaining. Take their 2000 Oscar flashback for example, an episode that allows the co-hosts (plus guests from another great movie podcast, *This Had Oscar Buzz*) to talk Steven Soderbergh's historic year; how most Best Picture nominees would likely be TV shows today; and the insane idea that Al-Qaeda wanted to kidnap Best Actor winner Russell Crowe as part of a "cultural destabilization plot." Seriously, listen just for that.

In normal years, the podcast would lack the time to dedicate an entire episode to answering the question: "Does *The Social Network* Deserve an Anniversary Celebration?" But the pandemic has forced the format to slow down and thus innovate.

Made for those who find themselves deep-diving IMDB pages and who remember crazy "For Your Consideration" campaigns (I'm looking at you, David Lynch, and your roadside cow), the podcast is still setting up the 2021 Oscars, albeit at a more deliberate pace. Shoutout to their love for Maria Bakalova, the breakout star and surprising Oscar potential from *Borat 2*.

— Christopher Lantinen



CONDÉ NAST/VANITY FAIR

### Til Death Do Us Blart

Hosted by: Tim Batt, Griffin McElroy, Justin McElroy, Travis McElroy, and Guy Montgomery  
Movie, Comedy

Traditions are important. Sometimes, those traditions last forever, living on long after we shuffle off this mortal coil. That's sort of how *Til Death Do Us Blart* works. The show is hosted by the McElroy

Brothers, the prolific podcasters behind *My Brother, My Brother, and Me* and *The Adventure Zone*, who team up with New Zealand comedians Tim Batt and Guy Montgomery of *The Worst Idea of All Time* to watch *Paul Blart Mall Cop 2*. Every (American) Thanksgiving, one episode is released, forever. It has been established that each guest is to choose a successor in the event of their death, allowing the podcast to theoretically continue until the end of recorded time.

It's hilarious, whether hearing the hosts try to pronounce the movie's name, going stir crazy, or showing Stockholm syndrome in appreciation of the subpar film. In April of this year, a special episode was released, discussing the original (and in the hosts' opinion, inferior) *Paul Blart Mall Cop*. If you're not familiar with *TWloAT*, that podcast had Batt and Montgomery repeatedly watch the same bad movie every week and talk about it. Since 2014, they've kept their feed packed, with seasons covering movies such as *Grown Ups 2* and both *Sex and the City* movies. Like a disgusting banana, it's a Thanksgiving tradition for podcast fans to savor.

— Nick Warren



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## MOVIE REVIEWS

### Robert Zemeckis' Take On Roald Dahl Is Not Very Bewitching

★★

In 1990, a film came out that left children scarred for life, a film with convincing practical effects and a villain with a commanding presence. This movie was *The Witches*, based on Roald Dahl's book of the same name, and like most nostalgic films, it has been given a remake, this time directed by Robert Zemeckis with Guillermo Del Toro attached as a producer. *The Witches* tells the story of a young boy and his grandmother who wind up staying at the same hotel where a coven of witches is plotting to eliminate the children of the world by turning them into mice. Remaking the original film is not inherently a bad thing — changing the setting to 1960s Alabama actually had potential to give a fresh take on the source material, and for the first third of the film, it looked like it would. Octavia Spencer's performance as the grandmother alongside Jahzir Bruno as the main protagonist was very compelling, and leads the audience to believe this was going to be a strong film that could stand on its own. In the most unfortunate case of irony, the worst part of *The Witches*.....is the witches.



WARNER BROS. PICTURES

Anne Hathaway's performance as the leader of this coven, the Grand High Witch, will make viewers wonder how on earth witches avoided being discovered for so long. She screams, breaks multiple pieces of hotel furniture, and publicly draws attention to her suspicious activities. While the Grand High Witch was written to have an accent, it is doubtful that Hathaway's combination of Frau Blücher from *Young Frankenstein* and the Swedish Chef was what Dahl had in mind. To make matters worse, the overall choices of digital effects miss the mark in so many ways. The animals stand out as if they are from a completely different movie, and the choice to give the witches three long fingers on each hand is frankly insensitive to individuals with limb differences. After seeing what Del Toro and Zemeckis have been capable of in the past, it's concerning to see that they appear to be going backwards. — Claudia Rose

Currently streaming on HBO Max // Directed by: Robert Zemeckis // Written by: Zemeckis, Kenya Barris, and Guillermo del Toro // Starring: Anne Hathaway, Octavia Spencer, Stanley Tucci, Jahzir Bruno, and Chris Rock // 106 Minutes // Rated PG

### The Whole World is Watching: *The Trial of the Chicago 7* is Too Conventional for Its Own Good

★★★

A period film is never just about the period it is depicting. They are always made to make a statement, either comforting or upsetting, about the time in which they are made. Even though Aaron Sorkin's new film *The Trial of the Chicago 7* is set in 1969, it's quite clearly speaking to our own era of political uncertainty and open hostility towards protest. The film is supposed to be a celebration of revolutionaries, so it breaks my heart that Sorkin chose to present it in the most safe, conventional method possible. What should be a battle cry ends up more like a TV movie-of-the-week.



NETFLIX

Following the riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, the film follows eight protesters who were arrested and charged with conspiracy to start a riot. As the case drags on for weeks and months on end, it becomes obvious to these men that the system is determined to make an example of them and what follows becomes one of the most notorious trials in American history.

As is expected of Sorkin (*The West Wing*, *A Few Good Men*, *The Social Network*, etc.), the writing is sharp and energetic with rapid-fire dialogue and witty humor. The directing, however, sadly follows the rules and conventions of the courtroom drama playbook step-by-step — anyone who has ever seen a movie before in their life will find no surprises here. With no real directorial flair, the actors are forced to carry the film on their backs. Some are more than up to the task (Mark Rylance), others are left out in the cold (Eddie Redmayne and Joseph Gordon-Levitt). A story about radicals requires a radical director and Sorkin is about as un-radical as they get. — Forest Taylor

Currently available on Netflix // Written and directed by: Aaron Sorkin // Starring: Sacha Baron Cohen, Eddie Redmayne, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Jeremy Strong, Mark Rylance, John Carroll Lynch, Alex Sharp, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Frank Langella, and Michael Keaton // 130 minutes // Rated R

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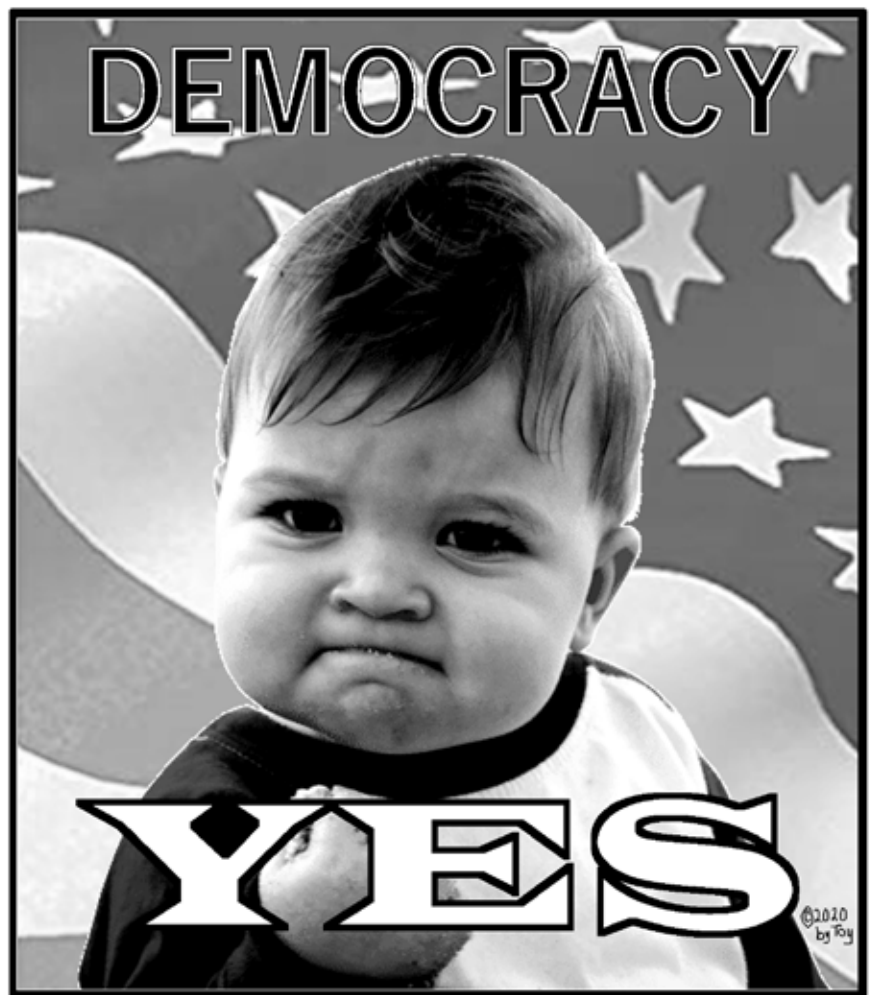


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## ALBUM REVIEWS

### Mr. Bungle

*The Raging Wrath of The Easter Bunny Demo*  
Ipecac Records



This is the first album Mr. Bungle has released since 1999's *California*, seeing the band go back to their roots. Known



for blending genres at a breakneck speed, mixing offensive and jokey lyrics with complex musical structures, the band is fronted by Mike Patton, the vocalist behind acts like Faith No More, Fantômas, Tomahawk, and more. On *The Raging Wrath of the Easter Bunny Demo*, Mr. Bungle revisits their self-released demo tape, made in 1986, which was straightforward thrash metal. Three original members from this era are on this re-recording, with Dave Lombardo (Slayer) filling in on drums and Scott Ian (Anthrax) on rhythm guitar. Overall, this is a solid thrash record with standout tracks "Raping Your Mind", "Eracist", and "Mathematics." The only time Mr. Bungle strays from the thrash sound is on the track "Hypocrites/ Habla Espanol O Muere" where they take a dig at our current political climate and blend a Latin-style medley over an S.O.D. cover. The whole record clocks in around an hour and without a change in musical styles, it starts to feel a bit redundant. Had the band chosen to cut ten minutes from the record, it would have been near-perfect. — Larry Wheaton

### Nothing

*The Great Dismal*  
Relapse Records



There has perhaps never been a year better suited for a Nothing record than 2020. The band has been experi-



menting with its unique brand of nihilistic dream pop since 2010, and while their 2018 album *Dance on the Blacktop* was a bit too muddy and uneven to leave a lasting impression, it seems all it took was a pandemic and a tumultuous year of civil unrest to set the stage for the band's best and darkest album yet. *The Great Dismal* isn't just a topical title — it's accepting that the end is here. *The Great Dismal* may also be Nothing's heaviest record to date, oftentimes hearkening back to their full-length debut, *Guilty of Everything*. This is largely due to the presence of new guitarist Doyle Martin, frontman of shoegaze band Cloakroom. Additional help comes from prolific singer-songwriter Alex G, who shares production duties and offers guest vocals on the aforementioned "April Ha Ha." Ultimately, *The Great Dismal's* success comes down to cohesiveness; here, songs like "Say Less" that showcase an atypically aggressive energy (and industrial influence) sit comfortably next to some of the catchiest tracks the band has ever written ("Catch a Fade"). — Aaron Mook

### Oneohtrix Point Never

*Magic Oneohtrix Point Never*  
Warp Records



With *Magic Oneohtrix Point Never*, it feels like Danial Lopatin's experi-



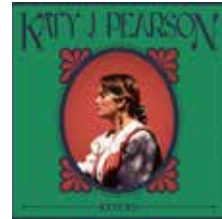
mental electronic project has finally come full circle. The pioneer of vaporwave has spent over a decade forging new styles of synth and sample-based prog-pop that often explores heady themes of life, death, and deterioration in both human beings and audio; now, on a record whose name is inspired by the seminal radio station Magic 106.7, Lopatin has crafted a garbled, psychedelic masterpiece that roughly emulates the feeling of channel surfing with your car radio on another planet. The reception may be fuzzy, the source unidentifiable, but it's hard to deny an earworm when you hear one. It doesn't take long for songs like the propulsive "I Don't Love Me Anymore," or the warbly "Lost But Never Alone" to set up camp in the back of your mind. Lopatin also recruits *Uncut Gems* and *After Hours* collaborator The Weeknd for general guidance, a co-producer credit, and a well-placed vocal cameo on the '80s ballad replicant, "No Nightmares." Challenging as it may be, *Magic Oneohtrix Point Never* offers listeners one of the most thrilling and unforgettable journeys of the year. — Aaron Mook

### Katy J Pearson

*Return*  
Heavenly Recordings



This was the kind of album I needed. *Return* is upbeat and poppy with a hint of morose intelligence that makes it sing.

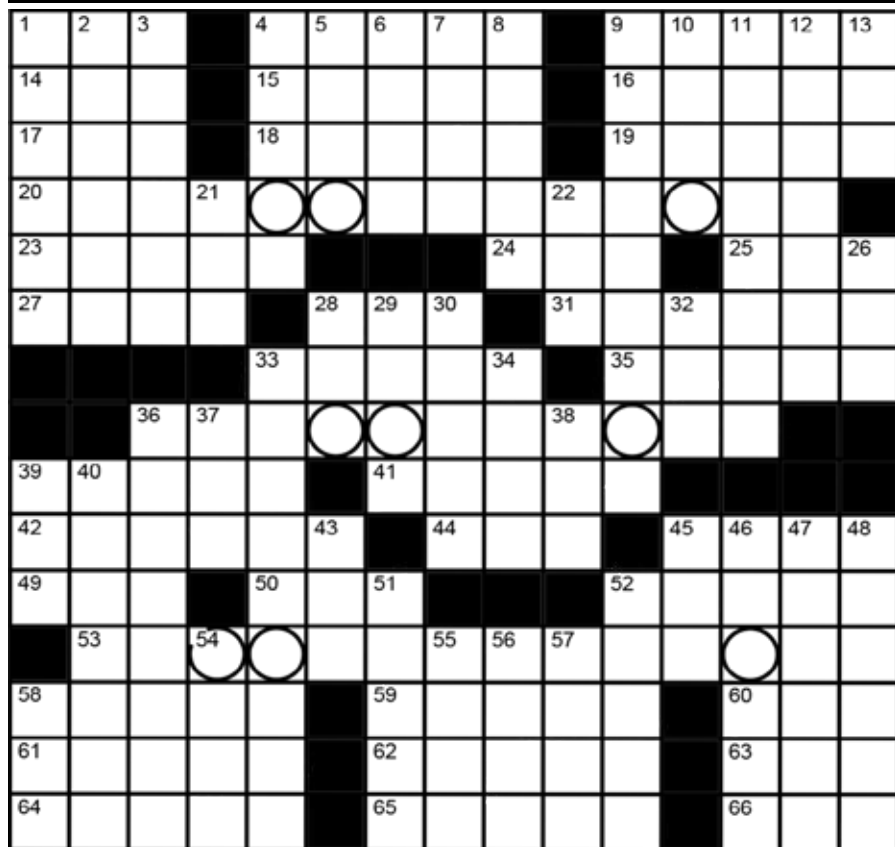


The debut record from Katy J Pearson sees the Bristol, UK songstress keyed into an incredibly inviting sound. Combining an alt-country feel with indie folk and pop sensibilities, Pearson has a true gift for melody. Her voice and delivery have the strength and sweetness of Julia Jacklin or Angel Olsen, but there's one singer she'll probably be most compared to: Stevie Nicks. Perhaps it's perfect timing following Matt Apodaca's viral "Dreams" TikTok, and maybe more than a coincidence hearing the opening tracks, "Tonight" and "Beautiful Soul." Either way, Pearson has made something great, and endlessly listenable. Whenever the string sections come in, it's emotionally captivating, and when she lets loose, even more so. Anthemic album highlights like "Take Back the Radio" pop, as do the tender, stripped-down moments of the album's titular track, the title alluding to a failed record deal she had with her brother and her return to music writing. It may not be sonically groundbreaking, but it might also be one of the best debuts of the year. — Nick Warren

## TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



# CROSSWORD



## Across

1. Writing implement extending from start to end of 20-, 36- and 53-Across
4. Hoisting device
9. Cappuccino cousin
14. Morales who was Bolivia's president from 2006-19
15. Nebraska's capital before Lincoln
16. 2003 NBA Rookie of the Year Stoudemire
17. \_\_\_ music
18. Brought home the gold
19. No longer sleeping
20. Risking mutual destruction, say
23. You might RSVP to one with a click
24. "You've got mail" co.
25. "Who am \_\_\_ judge?"
27. Tear to bits
28. Yoga \_\_\_
31. Traditional Christmas gift for a child
33. One of the Hawaiian Islands
35. Things equestrians have on hand?
36. Frank
39. Cook's garment
41. They make tracks
42. Hannah who coined the phrase "the banality of evil"

44. Nutritional fig.

45. Long-billed wading bird
49. 100° or more, say
50. Drop-\_\_\_ (unexpected visitors)
52. That's an order
53. "Yes, duly noted"
58. They're raised on farms
59. NBA legend Thomas
60. Tyrant Amin
61. Madison Sq. Garden player
62. "Taxi" character Elaine
63. Actor Cage, in tabloids
64. Serta competitor
65. Shot in the dark
66. It's found in a 1-Across ... as well as in this puzzle's circled letters, aptly

## Down

1. Bell, e.g.
2. Change over time
3. Half a workout mantra
4. "Gosh, will you look at that!"
5. "That's my cue!"
6. Da \_\_\_, Vietnam
7. In vogue
8. \_\_\_ yoga
9. Supreme Court aides
10. Out of control
11. "Enjoy this spectacular view!"
12. State capital near

Princeton

13. Morn's counterpart
21. Since Jan. 1
22. + or - particle
26. Kvetching cries
28. \_\_\_ tai
29. Julia Roberts, to Emma Roberts
30. Shocking weapon
32. Tiny
33. Moscow-born abstract artist Wassily
34. Modern replacement for a cash register
36. Capital city north of Johannesburg
37. Horror star Chaney
38. Singer/songwriter Rita
39. "What a relief!"
40. C3H8, familiarly
43. Explosive stuff
45. \_\_\_ B. Wells who received a 2020 Pulitzer citation for her pioneering work in journalism
46. String \_\_\_
47. Trapped at a ski lodge, maybe
48. Xmas VIP
51. Some big band music
52. Community spirit
54. With: Abbr.
55. Jacob's biblical twin
56. Retired Italian money
57. Young fellows
58. Barnes & Noble's NYSE symbol, aptly



## Answers to last puzzle



*I created Panache to provide Erie with both quality service and a wonderful aesthetic experience. This year, as difficult as it has been, Panache celebrates 20 years of delighting thousands of guests. My paramount objective throughout the past months has been to make Panache Salon and Spa the safest environment possible for our team members and our guests. My dedicated team has gone above and beyond to create and implement safety procedures, completely ensuring public confidence. I offer my deepest gratitude to all our clients for their continued support and trust in Panache. Panache is in the running to be selected as both the Best Spa and the Best Salon in the Erie Reader publication. Each of our team members would deeply appreciate it if you would take a moment to vote for Panache in both categories. Our staff continually strives to offer the absolute best in customer experience, and I believe they should be chosen. Stay healthy and calm during these challenging times. We look forward to seeing you soon at Panache!*

*Edna Siegel*

Owner

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