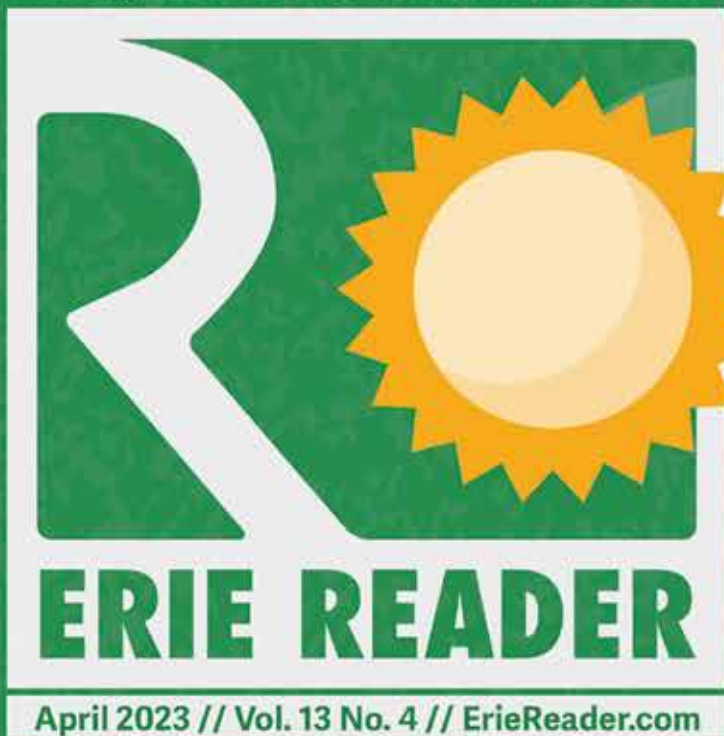


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GAINING GROUND ON THE ACTIVE ERIE PLAN

WORKING TO MAKE TRAVEL SAFER FOR VULNERABLE
ROAD USERS DESPITE SQUEAKY WHEELS

EAST PALESTINE TRAIN DERAILMENT

WEIGHING PROFIT VS. PUBLIC SAFETY
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From the Editors**A changing climate**

A new report on climate change was released by the United Nations (UN) this past month, and its contents are jarring, although they should come as no surprise: the planet is on track for catastrophic warming which is already causing extreme weather across the globe. Heat waves, flooding, droughts, hurricanes, and wildfires are killing and displacing people worldwide while causing untold economic damage. The major driving force behind the unceasing increase in the earth's temperature is oil and gas extraction and burning of fossil fuels.

According to an NPR report from March 20, "The planet is nearly two degrees Fahrenheit warmer than it was in the late 1800s, and is on track to exceed five degrees of warming by the end of the century ... That kind of extreme warming would spell disaster for billions of people, as well as critical ecosystems, and would lead to irreversible sea level rise and mass extinction of plants and animals."

It is easy to feel powerless, especially when business leaders and politicians seem to take definitive steps backward at every turn. It's hard to see the point of sipping out of a soggy paper straw while billionaires are jettisoning off to space in their privately built rocket ships or when environmental regulations are rolled back for an entire presidential term (and in some cases permanently) for short-term economic gain. Or when major corporations like Norfolk Southern look the other way from regulations and safe reporting, and end up spilling major environmental contaminants into residential areas and poisoning waterways that serve millions of people.

The UN report notes that communities can make measurable changes to help combat climate change and that these changes need to start happening NOW to keep atmospheric temperatures at or (ideally) below current levels. These changes include "investing in low-carbon public transit, designing communities to support walking or biking, building homes and other buildings to be resilient, and building cleaner power plants to reduce air pollution."

So how is Erie measuring up? Who is helping? Who is hindering? Inside this issue, we take a look at the aforementioned train derailment and how local communities are prepared for dealing with this (not-so-infrequent) occurrence. We look at a local effort to improve our bicycle infrastructure to benefit all vulnerable road users and those who are, somehow, dead-set against it. We look at a local chapter of Groundwork USA and how they are working to reclaim vacant lots in the city for sustainable-use projects and youth stewardship. We look for the helpers: seed libraries, local cleanup efforts, a local wildlife rescue, a newly formed composting company, and a consortium devoted to promoting the growth of native plant species.

This is the first edition the Reader has dedicated to climate change related issues and it won't be the last, as we hope to continue to report on these matters and their impact locally (and globally) for the foreseeable future. It is imperative that we — as a country and a community — find a way to join the global community and work towards making sure that we actually *have* a foreseeable future.

Gaining Ground on the Active Erie Plan

Working to make travel safer for vulnerable road users despite squeaky wheels

By: Erin Phillips

Like approximately 10 percent of all American adults during the pandemic, my family started bicycling. I've had my 1979 Schwinn Collegiate three-speed since the early 2000s, so I dragged it out of the garage and had it tuned up at John Adams Cycling and Fitness. I bought an attachable trailer from a local sporting goods store to tow my toddler along, and my older child was given a bike through a family hand-me-down.

We hit the road a great deal in the summer months, riding from our West Bayfront home and enjoying the bike lane across West Sixth Street through Frontier, connecting to the multi-use path alongside Cascade Creek, across the Bayfront, and back up the hill by the Water Works — usually walking our bikes halfway; it's a doozy, especially with the toddler downforce — to the multi-use path that runs along the bluff at Bayview Park, where we'd often cool down at the splash pad oasis. It has made for fun, adventurous summers. I've seen my daughter's confidence grow as she has led in front, navigating the roads, and employing the safety measures we have taught her.

This lighthearted cycling story would be even more idyllic if I could say that this level of safety, planning, and care existed throughout the city. The aforementioned trail is one of very few intentional bike paths in the City of Erie. Traveling by bicycle with my children has made me acutely aware of the real lack of safe biking infrastructure in the city. Not including multi-use paths, there are fewer than *two miles* of dedicated bike lanes in the city (by comparison, the city of Norwalk, Connecticut — with roughly the same population as Erie — has 30 miles of dedicated bike lanes). So I was thrilled when I heard that the city was planning to seriously work on it.

The Active Erie Plan

The Active Erie plan was launched in 2019 when “the city of Erie began a master planning process that focuses on building a network of bike and pedestrian facilities throughout the community,” according to the Active Erie website. The goal of the plan is to update Erie's bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to include more safe, multimodal options on an interconnected route throughout the city, adding relatively inexpensive bike and pedestrian friendly lanes, signage, and street level upgrades to make travel safer for cyclists, pedestrians, and, ultimately, motorists.

This plan started with multiple public planning meetings, which allowed any interested citizen from throughout the City of Erie to voice their opinions, concerns, and hopes to the hired consulting firm Whitman, Requardt, and Associates (WRA) — a nationally recognized engineering, architectural, construction management, and environmental firm specializing in transportation — along with the mayor, City Council, and an impressively large steering committee representing key stakeholders (including the City of Erie traffic engineer, the fire department,



The Erie Sports Commission and Bike Erie work to bring events like Lake Erie Cyclefest to Erie each year. This photo shows the participants in 2022's Downtown Slow Roll which is a beginner-friendly, guided 10-mile ride through multiple city neighborhoods.

the planning commission, the planning director, Erie Public Schools, the EMTA, Erie Arts and Culture, the Erie Community Foundation, the Erie Downtown Partnership, the Mayor's Disability Roundtable, Millcreek Township, the Metropolitan Planning Association, Bike Erie, the Health Department, refugee representation, and PennDOT).

During the pandemic, public meetings were paused and instead, multiple surveys were sent out requesting public input on the proposed bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements. These surveys indicated that nearly 60 percent of people agree that bicycle amenities needed to be improved. There was also a well-publicized public bike ride in October of 2020 that allowed any interested citizen, including the steering committee and stakeholders, to ride along to (or meet up at) different public areas where WRA was proposing a bike lane, while they set up presentation materials for citizens to learn more about the projects, and voice concerns or ideas. This event was open to the public and was attended by the mayor himself (who was, ironically, nearly clipped by a car while riding along).

After this period of public input, and a hefty amount of work from the consultants, the planning department, and the steering committee, the rollout of the first leg of the Active Erie plan was presented in January of 2023. This is a long range plan with an ultimate goal of having all work completed throughout the city by 2042. As a starting point, the plan focuses on where safe cycling is truly lacking: north to south routes throughout the city.

The Active Erie plan focused proposed bike lanes on streets that are “less stress,” and so steered away

from busier, congested north to south thoroughfares, with initial routes proposed for Greengarden Boulevard and French Street. These streets will eventually connect to a complete network of bike lanes throughout the city that will allow cyclists — or those using other forms of mobility besides a motor vehicle (often referred to as vulnerable road users) enhanced safety and protection as they navigate the city. It is worth noting that the funding for the bike infrastructure improvements on Greengarden and French has already been secured through grant funding from the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and that funding cannot be used for anything else.

Eric Brozell, Active Erie steering committee member and bicycle training coordinator for the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network, states, “The Active Erie concept really is about making our streets safe for the most vulnerable. Few of us living today know of a time when cars didn't come first on our streets. When our streets are safe for the most vulnerable, they will be safer for all street users, including pedestrians, people on bikes, people using wheelchairs, and cars.”

Other planned bike routes include West and East Sixth and 10th streets, connecting the bike lanes in the west part of the city to the downtown corridor, and continuing east to Franklin Avenue and Bird Drive. Southbound routes will ultimately connect at 38th Street, creating multiple paths of dedicated bike routes connecting all corners of the city. But the plan needs to start somewhere and that starting point happens to be on Greengarden Boulevard.

Squeaky Wheels

While the planning of Active Erie has been years in



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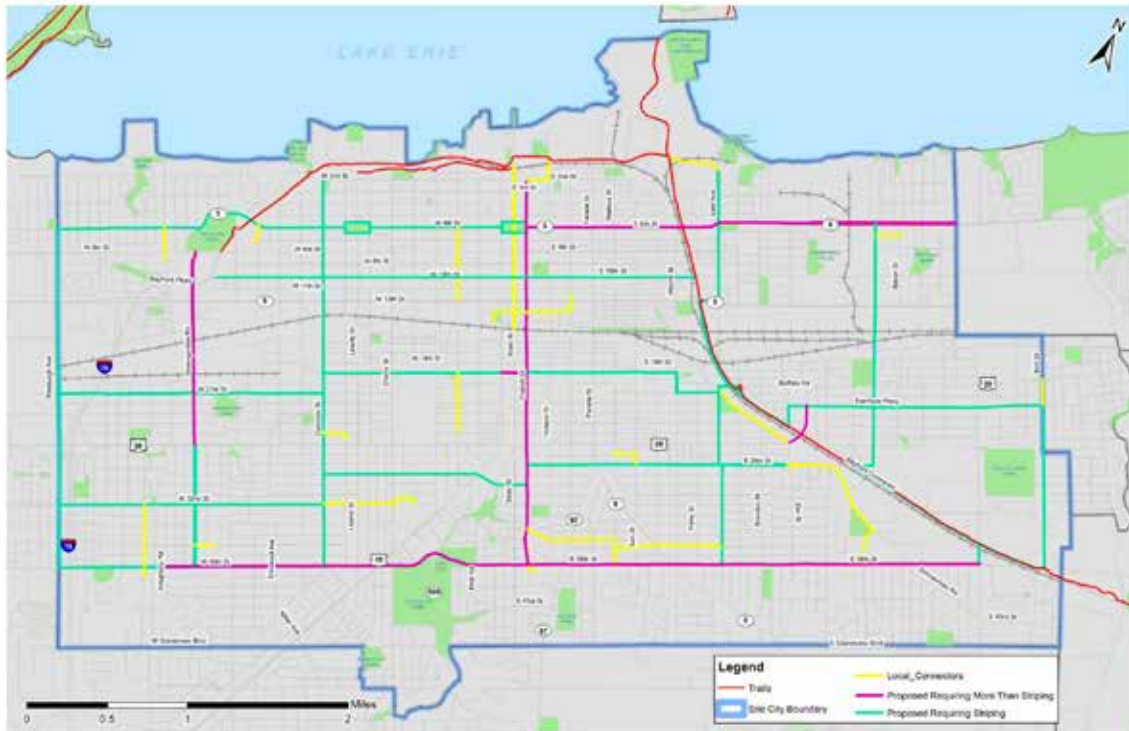


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ACTIVE ERIE LOW-STRESS BIKEWAY NETWORK



This map, published on the City's Active Erie plan website, shows all of the proposed bike lane improvements planned throughout the city, which will connect all routes to a network that will allow vulnerable road users safer access.

the making, with allowance for public input at every step along the way, there are a smattering of neighbors along Greengarden Boulevard south of 26th Street who feel a perceived lack of transparency, and feel as though their opinions were not sought after throughout the planning process. As a result, and since the announcement of the rollout of the project, they have exercised their right to voice their opinions on the Active Erie plan, which largely amounts to: "we are against the proposed bike lane on Greengarden."

Many residents spoke during the most recent City Council meetings and at a special meeting held specifically to discuss the proposed Greengarden bike lane, which included City Council, the Mayor, and the members of the steering committee. The residents brought up a number of points as to why the on-street parking within the stretch of Greengarden Boulevard from 26th to 38th streets should not be eliminated for the sake of a bike lane.

In order for the city to abandon a plan that was years in the making, one would think that the arguments provided by the neighborhood against the plan would have to outweigh the overall benefit for the rest of the city, or at least be based in fact. Let's take a look at what the neighbors are saying and whether or not their arguments against the bike lane will better serve the community at large.

1. My property value will decrease.

This argument assumes that removing street parking for the residences along Greengarden will have a negative impact on neighboring properties' value and/or affect the properties' saleability. This argument is, quite simply, not true. Each residence along Greengarden has access to a private driveway, many of which are quite long and provide space for multiple vehicles, as the homes are set back from the road.

Take a walk, drive, or bike ride along Greengarden and you will find nearly no cars regularly use the on-street parking, instead opting for their private driveways.

While it is true that for properties in metropolitan areas without private parking or driveways, no access on-street parking can have a negative effect on a property's assessed value, it is demonstrably *not* true for homes with private parking available. According to a study out of the Toulon School of Urban Studies and Planning at Portland State University, "access to higher-quality bike lanes can lead to a statistically significant *increase* in home values." The study further states that "each quarter mile closer to an advanced bike facility meant another \$690 premium for single family homes. Additionally, increasing density of advanced bike facilities within a half-mile led to about \$4,000 in value for single family homes."

A quality, dedicated bike lane connected to a network of bike lanes throughout the city will actually increase your property value.

2. Emergency vehicles will be hindered.

There is no situation in which a painted bike lane on a road will inhibit an emergency vehicle. Cyclists, like motorists, are required by law to yield the right of way to any emergency vehicle and emergency vehicles are not subject to the same parking restrictions as a normal motor vehicle. If your home is in need of a fire truck, ambulance, or police cruiser, those vehicles will be able to park within a painted bike lane for as long as necessary to accommodate the emergency. This is also true for temporary parking, like delivery trucks or a vehicle dropping off or picking up an elderly or disabled person. Any cyclist encountering a temporarily parked vehicle in a bike lane can simply, and using caution, go around that vehicle.

3. Contractors or landscapers working at my home will have nowhere to park.

During the City Council meeting held on March 15, Paul DeRaimo, a resident on Greengarden Boulevard stated, "On-street parking is vital when we have family over or guests, or when we have contractors who use on-street parking."

There are certainly plenty of homes throughout the City of Erie without direct on-street parking in front of their homes (including those along West Sixth Street and in Frontier whose homes border a bike lane) and those properties do not go without the occasional need for contract workers. Nearly every cross street bisecting Greengarden allows for on-street parking. Additionally, contract workers could potentially use the residents' ample driveways for temporary parking. These workers are paid to do a job, and they will find a way to do that job, regardless of access to on-street parking.

4. Bike lanes don't make cyclists safer.

According to Emily Aloiz, Erie County's Transportation Planning Administrator, "The state of Pennsylvania is under a 'vulnerable road users penalty' because the total yearly fatalities for vulnerable road users is greater than 15 percent of total traffic fatalities." As a result of this, Erie has received funding to be used to improve safety conditions for pedestrians and vulnerable road users (which includes cyclists) and it was recommended through the Active Erie plan development that Erie adopt a "Complete Streets Policy."

According to Smart Growth America, "Complete Streets is an approach to planning, designing, building, operating, and maintaining streets that enables safe access for all people who need to use them, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities." A major part of a Complete Streets policy is implementing bike lanes. The website continues, "*Incomplete streets* are the result of a process that fails to consider the needs of all people and outdated measures of what makes a street successful. The end product is a street that spans a spectrum from uncomfortable to downright deadly for those not using a car."

"We are in the midst of a historic, alarming increase in the numbers of people struck and killed by automobiles, which has been on a steady rise since 2009, reaching levels not seen in more than 30 years. Speed is the number one culprit in these fatalities. Speed is also the best predictor of whether or not a collision will result in an injury or a death. One of the best ways to reduce speeds and speeding is through a different approach to street design that prioritizes safety above all else, but especially over vehicle speed." Street designs that include dedicated bike lanes, improved sidewalks, signage, improved crosswalks and signals, narrowed streets, and widened berms all contribute to slowing traffic, which will in turn make vulnerable road users safer.

5. Cyclists should just ride on the sidewalks.

This practice is largely prohibited by Pennsylvania law. Additionally, although sidewalks are city property, it falls on the individual property owners to maintain them. Anyone who has spent any time on a city sidewalk recently can attest to their varying degrees

of maintenance and safety. It is simply not a lawful or safe option for cyclists to use the sidewalk.

The fear among bicycle advocates is that if the city gives in to the misguided demands of this neighborhood's residents it will set a precedent that can potentially derail the entire Active Erie plan. If one neighborhood complains and is accommodated, what's to stop people from other neighborhoods doing the same and pointing to the results on Greengarden to justify eliminating the bike routes on their streets?

The streets and the parking spaces on them are the property of the City of Erie and their function should be to serve Erie's street users in the best, most beneficial way possible. The reasoning behind the Greengarden residents' objections to the bike lane (as a loss of on-street parking) are not indicative of issues that would outweigh the potential benefits to a much larger demographic of people in the City of Erie. By sacrificing a few seldom-used parking spaces, we can bring Erie closer to becoming a safer environment for all of its vulnerable road users.

Why Do People Bike?

Now, if everyone was biking like my family and I did over the past few summers, one might be inclined to believe that what we have in terms of bike routes in Erie is sufficient. If you'd like to ride your bike for leisure, go ahead and take the Frontier/Bayfront path or circle Presque Isle. But not everyone rides bicycles simply for fun. For many, biking is a way of life, and for others it is the only affordable transportation option.

According to census data, over 19 percent of Erie households do not have access to a vehicle — that's nearly one out of every five households. Depending on the neighborhood, that percentage is much higher; for example in Downtown Erie, 65 percent of households have no vehicle available and in parts of East Bayfront and Little Italy those rates exceed 40 percent.

Amanda Gates — vice president of Bike Erie and a member of the Active Erie steering committee — uses her bicycle in combination with public transportation nearly exclusively. At one point in her life, her family owned two cars and found themselves in a constant precarious financial situation. "We were in debt and we had all these goals and we just could not reach them; we couldn't put money away; we couldn't afford an emergency. We had a couple of cars and we realized if we wanted to pay off our debt the cars had to go. As a result, we paid off all our debt — over \$20,000 worth of debt — in 18 months."

Owning a car is an incredible expense. The combination of car loan payments, gasoline, parking, routine and emergency maintenance, inspection, insurance, and registration averages upwards of \$10,000 a year, according to data collected by AAA. An individual working a full-time minimum wage job in Pennsylvania makes \$15,080 a year, so even in the best of all possible scenarios, owning a car for that person will easily take up at least half of their income each year. Gates continues, "There are people who will never be in a financial situation to have a car and there are



The residents of Greengarden Boulevard use their ample driveways for parking. At the time this photo was taken, there was not a single car parked on the street in southbound spaces from West 26th Street to 38th Street — there was only one car parked in the northbound lane.

families that are forced to have a car in this city because Erie is not friendly to any other type of transportation."

Stephanie Ciner, owner and operator of Wild Field Urban Farm on East Seventh Street, has lived without a car since young adulthood. She acquired her first bike upon graduating from college and living in Philadelphia: "It made sense to me as a way to commute to work, a way to go to the store. I lived in Philadelphia for quite a few years before moving here and the infrastructure was so different. Even though there was a lot of traffic, very narrow roads, and it was very busy, it was easy to get around by bike. It was much easier than having a car because you don't

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Cyclists Josh Gone (left) and Stephanie Ciner both use their bikes for a majority of their transportation needs in Erie, year-round. Both feel safe cycling infrastructure is lacking in Erie and look forward to improved conditions.

have to worry about parking or all the issues that come up with cars. I found it really empowering and also really affordable."

In Erie, Ciner has continued on without a car, running her farm and all that is involved with that (including traveling to and from farmer's markets, gathering and hauling supplies, etc.) from her bicycle (she has a regular pedal bike and also a cargo e-bike for heavier farm-related travel). Ciner continues, "Erie's a hard place to use your bike. Even though we're really set up for it — Erie's relatively flat, it's an easy city to navigate — if some things were different I think a lot more people would make use of a bike in Erie for transportation."

But what about the wintertime? Isn't the bikeability of Erie put on hold for half the year because of our winters? Not according to local cyclist Josh Gone. He has used his bicycle to get to and from work year-round. Gone comments, "I live near the Liberty Plaza

and in a five mile radius from there, I can get to all the places I need to go." Gone takes extra precautions for his own safety including wearing a helmet, using proper signals, using reflectors and lights, and wearing head-to-toe reflective safety gear. He feels that kind of basic bike safety is key to navigating the city.

Look For the Helpers

Bicycle infrastructure is just one side of the coin for pushing bike advocacy forward in Erie. There are some local organizations that have taken on the responsibility of bicycle safety education, maintenance, youth programs, and large-scale community biking events that puts cyclists and their interests in the spotlight.

The Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) houses the local chapter of the national program Trips for Kids whose mission is to "provide transformative experiences that promote healthy lifestyles, environmental awareness, and personal empowerment for young people of all communities, especially those most in need."

One of the stakeholders on the Active Erie Steering Committee who has also founded the bicycle program through the SSJNN, Eric Brozell, comments on his work with the organization, "The work at SSJNN is about providing safe bicycles to people without access to a decent bike nor an affordable bicycle repair shop nearby. The donated bikes that we provide are used bikes that our skilled volunteers repair to bring up to safe standards."

Brozell continues, "The second part of our program is to provide a repair space. This is complete with all tools required and technical support on how to repair a bike. We also try to help kids with safe bike riding skills. A few times a year we provide a Trips for Kids ride. We provide a bike for the ride, a helmet, lunch, and safe riding instruction. We may ride to the peninsula, a trail, or just around the city." Additionally, since the inception of the organization's bicycle program, they have given out over 300 bikes to refugees who now call Erie home, many of whom have no other reliable access to individ-

ual transportation.

Brozell is also a founder of Bike Erie (whose board is currently helmed by Gretchen Fairley, Amanda Gates, and Adam Trott) which is another organization in Erie helping to bring data-driven information to the Active Erie Steering Committee. Bike Erie also works in conjunction with the Erie Sports Commission to help bring cycling-related events to Erie each year with Lake Erie Cyclefest. These Cyclefest events help bring awareness about bike safety, laws, and rights, but also helps spread the word about how fun biking can be, and how it can help contribute to a healthy, enjoyable lifestyle.

2023's Lake Erie Cyclefest is scheduled for July 27-30 and will feature guided group rides for all levels of cycling experience. From the beginner-friendly Downtown Slow Roll (in which my family has participated for the past two years and enjoyed immensely) to the more intense Tour de West County with route options up to 50 miles beginning at Asbury Woods — these events draw hundreds of cyclists from around the area (and many visit from out of town to participate).

For many, biking is a fun way to get around, an activity for leisure or exercise, others depend on their bicycle for a number of reasons (financial, environmental, etc.). While the city ultimately determines the next course of action on the Active Erie plan, it is the hope of the majority of residents (at least 60 percent, given the results of the initial Active Erie survey) that the correct path is taken: one that ensures better safety measures are taken to help protect all vulnerable road users in Erie.

Progress on the Active Erie plan is stalled before the city makes a decision on how to move forward. As of this writing, another public survey recently concluded to obtain the public's input on how the Greengarden project should move forward. The online version of this article will publish any breaking news on this front.

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Let's Rock, Erie!

The excitement for Erie is palpable, and I'm here for it. If you're reading this, I suspect you are excited for Erie too. The Erie Reader publishes engaging articles about our local arts, culture, and stories of people making big waves in the city they love. These stories are evidence of a renaissance. Other rust belt cities have experienced a similar opportunity to redefine themselves. Now it's our turn.

Recently my daughter asked me, "If you love Erie so much, why should we want to change anything?" I explained to her that continually striving for self-improvement is an expression of self-love. We need to do better. People say a rising tide lifts all boats. This is only true for boats not already sunk. In a city with a median income of roughly \$22k a year, there are many boats unable to float. You don't have to dig too far into the history books to find our racial, economic, educational, and housing inequalities are a direct result of past leadership's decisions.

To overcome these challenges, we need a city council that acts with intention. We should continue to partner with investors

and stakeholders to generate revival. But our growth should also be inclusive and equitable. We can revitalize our neighborhoods without displacing a single resident. We can build a new generation of homeowners that, for the first time, know what it means to build generational wealth; instead of sending what wealth we have out of town via a rent check. We can inspire residents to become community builders, who will show future generations that civic engagement and service are necessary for our survival. Empathy and justice should be defining features of our decision-making, an expression of love for our city.

These beliefs inspired me to run for Erie City Council. I would love your support, but I also ask you to review ALL of the candidates in detail. Three of these candidates will set the course of Erie's future for decades. I invite you to get to know me and why I should be among these three.

Please call or text me at 814-460-2889. Email me at rock@rockcopeland.com. Let's talk about our shared vision for Erie, and how we can make it happen.



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Earthly Treasures

Three ideas to boost your eco awareness

By: Liz Allen

Teresa Guerrein understands that there are big threats to the environment, including climate change and microplastics pollution. But when it comes to protecting our planet — smaller, hands-on actions matter, too. Guerrein's commitment to cleaning up litter along Erie's bayfront is one of several pragmatic ideas to safeguard Erie's environment. You can find other hands-on ideas at the Erie County Public Library, with its programs and resources, and at Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier, which aims to plant 275,000 trees — one for every county resident — through its ReLeaf initiative.

As often as three times a day, Guerrein takes a grabber and bucket stored at Lakeshore Marine Services, the business she owns with her husband Eric, and picks up litter on lower State Street, at Dobbins Landing, and along access points to the east and west. On a recent sunny spring day, it took less than an hour to fill her bucket to the brim with cigarette butts, lighters, coffee cups, plastic straws, chicken bones, asphalt chips, napkins, wipes, twine, empty bread bags from those who feed the waterfowl, and a patch of carpet. Pointing to a map on the wall at the towing business, she explained how the prevailing westerly winds deposit debris along the bayfront. Careless humans also discard garbage there, and seagulls that scavenge in unsecured trash bins dump scraps of food.

There are other sources of pollution, too. "We know a lot comes from the storm sewer system. But where is it coming from? How does it get there?" she asked.

Sherri Mason, associate research professor and director of sustainability at Penn State Behrend, has been studying those questions, using information from booms installed on Mill Creek and Cascade Creek. Preliminary data can be found on a website she built with colleagues at Pennsylvania Sea Grant and the Erie County Conservation District at ErieLitterCritters.com; click on the data tab.

But the litter problem is also a question of supply and demand. There just aren't enough trash cans for the thousands of locals and tourists who flock to Erie's bayfront, Guerrein said, and when trash cans aren't emptied on weekends, they overflow. "Sometimes, it looks like a frat house after a Saturday night party," she said. She wonders what kind of impression hotel guests, boaters and other tourists get about Erie. "If we don't keep this area clean, it sullies our image," she said. "Presque Isle is a ring and Dobbins Landing is the precious stone, the diamond. We're called the Gem City for a reason."

Guerrein launched her efforts to pick up litter and to encourage others to beautify the bayfront about six years ago when she spotted "an orange, a used condom, and a hypodermic needle" in the water one day. That led her to partner with others, including staff from the Erie County Public Library and Keep Erie County Beautiful, to start Keep Our Bayfront Beautiful. The group is ready to become active again after



[Top] It doesn't take long to fill a bucket with litter from Erie's bayfront, according to Teresa Guerrein, who walks the area around lower State Street several times a day to clean up trash. [Bottom left] Millcreek Branch Library staffers Sarah Trohoske [left] and Bethany Lenda show off some of the plants available from the library's plant exchange. [Bottom right] Herb, flower, and fruit seeds were available at the recent seed exchange at the Millcreek Branch Library.

three years of COVID.

Getting a handle on litter doesn't just help the environment, she said. It's also important for the local economy, because of the amount of investment that has gone into developing the bayfront. In addition to Lakeshore Marine Services, the Guerreins operate Gem City Marina and a boat-storage facility with leases through the Erie-Western Pennsylvania Port Authority. Guerrein looks forward to welcoming new neighbors when Gannon University's Great Lakes Research and Education Center moves into the space adjacent to the marina. She's making plans to grow pollinator plants and start raised-bed gardens nearby, "something for the birds and the butterflies," she said.

Jenny Tompkins, PennFuture's campaign manager

for clean water advocacy for the Lake Erie Watershed, said that it's important "to clean up litter anywhere in the city when you see it before it goes into our separate storm sewer system or streams, and directly into the bay or lake." She also reminds city of Erie residents to pay their new stormwater fees, which will be used to upgrade the city's aging infrastructure and make sure that state and federal regulations can be met.

In the meantime, you are welcome to join Guerrein in picking up trash along the bayfront. You can stop by Lakeshore Marine Services, 34 State St., to borrow a bucket and a grabber, even if you can only spare 10 minutes during a walk. Guerrein will also supply volunteers with vests and gloves; the trash can be

disposed of in garbage cans in an outdoor corridor at Lakeshore.

Seeing Guerrein in action inspired Joshua Love, who was parked near Dobbins Landing, to want to pitch in, too. "I've lived here all my life," Love said. "I would like to be part of cleaning it up. I'll bring my kids down here," he said.

That's how to nurture environmentalists — leading by example and getting people to share ideas, something that happens regularly throughout the Erie County Public Library system. Blasco and the Millcreek, Edinboro, and Iroquois branches all offer seed libraries, and there are several programs coming up soon on such topics as square-foot gardening and planting trees. To cut down on your carbon footprint, you could even ride your bike to a library to attend programs about bicycle safety and repairs.

Sheryl Thomas, assistant library director, offered some additional ideas. "You can also check out and request tons of books on gardening, square-foot gardening, mulching, recycling, upcycling, and everything in between. Ebooks are available, too, for those preferring a digital format. You can use the Idea Lab to sew or mend clothes rather than tossing them. Or use one of the 3D printers to create a replacement part for something at home that's broken instead of buying a new one," she said.

"We offer a variety of databases that can be used for research on any number of issues. Specifically, GreenFILE draws on the connections between the environ-

ment and a variety of disciplines such as agriculture, education, law, health, and technology," Thomas said. The Millcreek Branch library has been a leader in connecting patrons to Earth-friendly ideas by offering resources on gardening and houseplants. Activities include plant and seed exchanges, and coming up April 13, a new garden club that will meet twice a month.

"It's another avenue to bring patrons in," said John

"Sometimes, [the bayfront] looks like a frat house after a Saturday night party. If we don't keep this area clean, it sullies our image. Presque Isle is a ring and Dobbins Landing is the precious stone, the diamond. We're called the Gem City for a reason." ~ Teresa Guerrein, co-owner of Lakeshore Marine Services

Euliano, Millcreek manager. "They can leave with something to work on and even start a garden to feed themselves. It seems like a win-win," he said. Since Sept. 22, 2021, the Millcreek library has exchanged at least 2,000 plants. The current selection includes green onions, outdoor succulents, willows, and even pineapples ready to be swapped for a donated plant.

Millcreek staffers Sarah Trohoske and Bethany Lenda hit upon the idea for a plant library after they

did a gardening program several years ago. "When people start to garden, an interest in improving the environment is likely to follow," Lenda said. Gardeners discover that they need healthy soil, water, and bees to be successful. Trohoske also pointed out that houseplants can improve health and indoor air quality. "They can help you sleep and help you relax," she said, noting that she has seen the benefits from raising snake plants.

The two co-workers also put together tips for gardeners, such as using eggshells, coffee grounds, and banana peels in the garden, even if you can't start a full-fledged compost pile. "You can really use all this stuff you're giving to the landfill for free," Lenda said.

Jessica Stefano, manager of the Iroquois Branch Library, 4212 Iroquois Ave. in Lawrence Park, is a former environmental educator. "It can sometimes be overwhelming when you look at the huge planet on which we live and think about all of the things we *should* be doing to care for it," she said. "I love that my position with the Erie County Public Library gives me the opportunity to help people narrow down the overwhelming list of environmentally conscious actions to simple and accessible things that they can actually accomplish."

For example, on April 24 from 6 to 7:15 p.m., Stefano will lead a program to explain the 100-Mile Diet Challenge. "Participants choose a week, month or season to commit to consuming only those products which are grown, produced, or manufactured within 100



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miles of their home,” Stefano said. “Embarking on a challenge like this, even just for a single week, can connect us with previously unknown local businesses, new ways of living a healthier life, and a new or renewed awareness of our impact on the world around us.”

You can also impact the world and address climate change by planting a tree. “ReLeaf is the Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park’s direct response to climate change and a chance for us to beautify our community spaces outside of Frontier Park,” the ReLeaf Project explains at releaferie.org. “Planting trees is one thing that virtually everyone in the United States can participate in that will address the problem of excess carbon in the atmosphere.”

John Vanco, ReLeaf project manager, elaborated on how to get involved. “We most definitely welcome everyone’s participation in ReLeaf. That participation can be in the form of volunteering for our activities, especially helping with tree giveaways, education programs, etc.,” he said. Trees provide “quantifiable economic value,” Vanco said, thanks to their role in “mitigating the impact of stormwater, shading our streets and homes, filtering pollutants from the air and water, functioning as windbreaks, and enhancing the beauty of our neighborhoods.”

Sometimes you have to be patient to see the fruits of your labor. Lenda, the Millcreek Library staffer, had a number of failed gardening projects before she realized she had to educate herself about gardening

basics. She succeeded when she started with onions and garlic. It also takes a long time to watch a tree grow from seedling to maturity.

But appreciation for the environment can begin at a young age. That’s what Sister Pat Lupo, Order of St. Benedict, does with youngsters at the Inner City Neighborhood Art House. Lupo also serves on the ReLeaf Education Committee. “The garden group is setting up a hydroponic garden tower to plant vegetables and flowers. The vegetables will be harvested throughout the year and the flowers will add beauty to the indoor environment. We are also planning a small pollinator garden on East Ninth Street,” she said. She continued: “The Aquatic Species group is learning about Pennsylvania’s Least Wanted Species and they will teach the other youth at the Art House about them. The Green Team has a tree nursery behind Neighborhood Art House, and each spring and fall we remove the cages, weed around the trees, and add compost. In another couple of years, they will be ready to move to their permanent home.”

Thanks to all of these efforts, Planet Earth, our permanent home, will be a better place to live, too.

Liz Allen credits the staffers at the Millcreek branch library with teaching her how to successfully grow garlic. You can reach her at lizallenerie@gmail.com.

Learn more

To volunteer to pick up litter along the bayfront, call Teresa Guerrein of Lakeshore Marine Services, 34 State

St., at 814-453-6387. Hours are limited now but as the boating season approaches, Lakeshore will be open seven days a week.

For more information about environmentally friendly programs at the Erie County Public Library, visit erielibrary.org and click on “events” to search the calendar for dates, library locations, and times for programs. Some programs require advance registration.

To find local expertise about gardening, join the “Backyard Gardeners of Erie Pa” Facebook page, started by Millcreek Branch Library staffers Sarah Trohoske and Bethany Lenda.

To learn how to plant trees, volunteer or donate to the ReLeaf project at the Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier, visit releaferie.org.

Coming up

On Thursday, April 13, the Millcreek Branch Library, 2088 Interchange Road, will kick off its new Garden Club, which will meet on Thursdays twice a month from 11 a.m. to noon during planting season. The club welcomes all gardeners, beginners to experts.

On Monday, April 17, in anticipation of Earth Day on April 22, the Millcreek Branch Library will give away pollinator-friendly seed mix while supplies last. One jar per family.

On Tuesday, April 18, at 6 p.m., Jenny Tompkins, PenFuture’s campaign manager for clean water advocacy in the Lake Erie Watershed, will speak on strategies to protect Erie’s bayfront at Blasco Library’s community classroom. Her talk is free and suitable for all ages.

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New Nonprofit Aims to Build a More Resilient, Just Erie from the Ground Up

Groundwork Erie joins national network to address environmental justice at the local level

By: Ben Speggen

Aaron Kerr's been a pastor and professor. Beginning in January, he pivoted to become an executive director — leading Groundwork Erie, the newest “trust” in Groundwork USA, a national network of now 21 locally-based organizations devoted to transforming the natural and built environment of low-resource communities to advance equity, health, and resilience.

Just as differences can be seen from neighborhood to neighborhood — a boulevard of trees, a trail running along a creek, boarded up windows, skyscrapers concentrated in a dense urban core — each trust (so-called because the Groundwork model originated in the United Kingdom, where a nonprofit charity is referred to as a trust) — differs.

But when one asks: What does Erie have in common with Mobile, Alabama, or Jacksonville, Florida? One can answer that those three places — plus the 18 other trusts in other communities — share a common vision and mission: to transform neglected land and waterways into community assets, increase resilience to climate change and environmental crises, increase access to healthy food, and cultivate the next generation of environmental leaders. The details can be found in *Views from the Crossroads*, Groundwork USA's 2021 “State of the Network” report.

Proof of idea has turned into proven results in the U.K. with an environmental justice movement that has renewed economically distressed towns and cities since the early 1980s. So, in 1996, the National Parks Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program along with the Groundwork USA Steering Committee, wanting a long-term strategy to better engage residents to improve public access to open space, brought the model stateside. The following year the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency joined with seed funding to launch the three pilot trust communities of Bridgeport, Connecticut; Lawrence, Massachusetts; and Providence, Rhode Island.

The 21st trust — Erie — officially began its pursuit to become a Groundwork USA Trust in April 2021. The Groundwork Erie Feasibility Study Steering Committee — which included the city of Erie, Bayfront East Side Taskforce, Eastside Grassroots Coalition, Erie Downtown Partnership, Erie Farm to School, Erie Redevelopment Authority, Our West Bayfront, ServErie, and the Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network — voted to approve its joint-effort feasibility study. But the group had been meeting regularly since May 2020, and had been drawing inspiration to plot action from “Erie Refocused,” the city's comprehensive plan drafted and submitted by the Alexandria, Virginia-based planning firm czb, LLC in 2016.

The word “trust” — aside from the British-English origin — is fitting. By design, the local trusts, so explained in *Views from the Crossroads*, serve as “trusted intermediaries between local government and neighborhood residents, engendering in communi-

ties the more commonly understood definition of the word ‘trust’: the trait of believing in the reliability and honesty of others.”

Over a Zoom call, Kerr tells me that he sees the role of Groundwork extending to include commerce and education, too, to create a space to “get real about what people — kids and adults — need to understand” when it comes to their relationship to their natural and built environments.

On March 22, Kerr and the Groundwork Erie transitional board met, and approved the organization's inaugural project: provide “on the ground” outreach and remediation of vacant property where the city is pursuing a Greenway Trail running from 12th Street to Sixth Street on the east side. That outreach to neighbors translates to inviting in their voices to the planning process to hear their ideas and listen to their concerns, Kerr explains.

This will include youth-involvement, according to

“How do we undo the normalizing of litter on the streets as just something we've come to accept; how do we jolt people out of the perception that it's OK to have plastic in our waters; how do shootings happen just blocks from beautiful parks, or at all, anywhere, for that matter; how does a house with a caving in roof sit next to another with a well-manicured lawn; how ... do we invest in that paradigm shift that takes hard conversations, boots willing to tread the ground to get the work done?” ~ Aaron Kerr, executive director of Groundwork Erie

Kerr, pointing to Groundwork USA's emphasis to engage and employ the community's younger residents. “All of this will be done with a central educational component for the employees, which will assess both technical and intellectual competencies with an eye toward development,” he tells me. “Summer employees will be able to say that because they worked for Groundwork Erie, they have these skills and knowledge moving forward into other employment. In general, workers will be assessing neighborhoods with an eye toward future projects, which will enhance climate resiliency in the Erie watershed.”

The Erie Community Foundation has provided \$15,000 of startup funds, and the city has four-years-worth of funding through the American Rescue Plan Act at \$35,000 per year through 2026. Part of Kerr's work moving forward will be to raise funds to increase resources and therefore increase capacity.

Other parts include finding office space, building a team, and getting the word out.

“I'm a gatherer,” Kerr tells me. “My goal is to be that



Executive director of Groundwork Erie Aaron Kerr stands on a vacant lot near East Seventh and Ash. It is on urban land like this that Groundwork Erie aims to develop, hoping to enhance climate resiliency in the Erie watershed.

person who helps people to belong to a process and gathers people together who otherwise are up in their silos, worried about their own survival.”

When I ask Kerr on the call what becoming a part of the Groundwork USA network means to Erie, the former philosophy professor becomes philosophical.

“There's a new movement that addresses the concurrence of environmental racism and the degradation of nature, because of our economic system,” Kerr tells me. He goes on to ponder: “How do we undo the normalizing of litter on the streets as just something we've come to accept; how do we jolt people out of the perception that it's OK to have plastic in our waters; how do shootings happen just blocks from beautiful parks, or at all, anywhere, for that matter; how does a house with a caving in roof sit next to another with a well-manicured lawn; how ... do we invest in that paradigm shift that takes hard conversations, boots willing to tread the ground to get the work done?”

“This,” Kerr tells me, as if to raise his chin and wave his arms around, “is not normal. Why have we grown used to it in this era? We've got to get out of it. We've just got to start saying, ‘It's time. If not now, when?’ for intergenerational justice.”

Kerr tells me he's a grandfather. He hopes his grandchild can live in Erie for decades well into the future. “It's time to stop talking and start demonstrating some connection between human beings,” he tells me.

What better way to start than by including residents, and what better place to start than from the ground up.

Ben Speggen can be reached at bSpeggen@ErieReader.com and you can follow him on Twitter [@BenSpeggen](https://twitter.com/BenSpeggen).

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Way Off Track

Weighing profit vs. public safety in wake of East Palestine train derailment

By: Jonathan Burdick

Huntington, West Virginia is a city of 50,000 residents only a few short miles east of Kentucky and just south of the Buckeye State, the Ohio River serving as its northern border. In June 1998, 30 freight cars of a 148-car train derailed on its northeastern edge, less than a football field's distance away from the river. From the overturned cars poured 30,000 gallons of formaldehyde, a chemical that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention describes as being a "highly toxic systemic poison" that can severely burn the eyes and skin, cause dizziness, and even lead to suffocation.

Fortunately, there were no serious injuries. The spill was also contained before it entered the river. Still, questions remained. How could evacuees be certain it was safe to go back home? What if other substances on board — sodium hydroxide, hydrochloric acid, molten sulfur, and chlorine — had spilled too? What if there had been an explosion? Moving forward, just how safe were they? How prepared were they?

In the wake of the Norfolk Southern freight train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio in February, which exposed the community and first responders to dangerous vinyl chloride, these questions have entered the public conversation once again. *What* exactly comes through our communities — whether by rail, road, or waterways? What plans are in place if such a disaster were to strike our neighborhoods? Are we taking a more preventative or reactive approach with our safety measures and plans?

"The fire service as a whole in the United States is woefully under-trained and woefully under-equipped to respond to a large-scale hazmat (aka hazardous material) incident like this," a member of the International Association of Fire Fighters who trains firefighters on hazmat incidents told NPR in March. This aligns with what was reported following the East Palestine derailment: most of the hundreds who were initially on the scene to assist lacked proper training and even the most basic of hazmat equipment. What appeared to locals like a lack of transparency in the days that followed (and the decisions being made that put East Palestine in the national spotlight) did not help with perceptions either — many left wondering who was even calling the shots. The local fire chief? Norfolk Southern? The Environmental Protection Agency?

Speaking to the Senate Commerce Committee, Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw stressed that safety was a corporate priority and even pledged to voluntarily create a training center for dealing with hazardous materials, but he notably stopped short of endorsing proposed bipartisan legislation on rail safety.

His comments also did not seem to inspire much confidence in communities wondering whether they might be the next site of a dangerous derailment, an incident such as in Graniteville, South Carolina in 2005 when two Norfolk Southern trains collided, exposing



Approximately 1,500 people were forced to evacuate their homes in East Palestine, Ohio after a cloud of toxic chemicals exploded into the sky following a train derailment. Environmental contaminants are regularly transported by rail in the U.S. and very few officials are trained on how to properly react when such a disaster occurs.

hundreds to toxic chlorine and killing nine. South Dakota News Watch referred to the chemicals that come through its state each year as the "11 billion-pound mystery." A number of fire chiefs and health officials have publicly pleaded for railroads to provide more transparency on what is being transported through communities, a concept that railroad companies have pushed back against for decades. Amanda Garrett, writing for the Akron Beacon Journal wrote, "People in East Palestine, like others who live near rail tracks across the country, don't know what's on the freight cars and tankers passing through their town."

There are 28,000 locomotives to carry 1.6 million railcars across 140,000 miles of rail lines in the United States. Over the past two decades, U.S. Bureau of Transportation data shows there have been over 50,000 train derailments across the country over the past two decades. With freight railroads so essential to the nation's supply chain, speculation and assertions continue as to the inevitability of such derailments as well as to what degree past derailments have been preventable.

The Association of American Railroads, whose members include Amtrak, Norfolk Southern Railway, and Union Pacific, among others, highlighted in its recent March 2023 newsletter (notably without mentioning East Palestine) that the last decade has been the "safest ever" for railroads, and that accidents requiring a hazardous material response have been at an "all-time low." They note that more than "99.9 percent of all hazmat moved by rail reaches its destination without a release caused by a train accident" and that hazardous material rail accidents have decreased by 78 percent since 2000.

Indeed, dive into pre-2000 newspaper archives reporting about pretty much *anywhere* throughout the United States and one will likely see story after story

covering derailment after derailment, year after year. Chemical spills. Explosions. Evacuations. Bridge collapses. Close call after close call.

Sometimes derailments were more inconvenient than dangerous, such as when plywood was dumped in the center of Union City, Pa., tying up traffic for two days or outside of Lake City, Pa. when beef and USPS mail were scattered across the countryside.

In other cases, the danger posted was much more significant. In Ashtabula, Ohio in 1963, 55 cars derailed at 50 miles per hour leading to the explosion of a tank carrying an unreported chemical. In Irving, New York in 1965, mere feet from the shores of Lake Erie, a train derailed with cars that included primarily passengers and mail — but the conductor alerted authorities that other cars included explosive and even *radioactive* material. A "special crew" dispatched by the Atomic Energy Commission was sent to assist with cleanup.

The same year near Conneaut, Ohio, 17 cars derailed, spilling deadly hydrogen cyanide, which, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "affects the body's use of oxygen and may cause harm to the brain, heart, blood vessels, and lungs." Fortunately, according to reports at the time, the winds worked in their favor and didn't send the toxic fumes into the nearby populated areas. Elsewhere in the United States, derailments were also frequent. One 1973 butane explosion in Georgia was described as being "like an atomic bomb."

Lack of communication and coordination following a crash sometimes exacerbated the problem. In February 1975, in Harborcreek, Pa., a Norfolk and Western train derailed resulting in the need of a salvage crew. During this process, cars caught fire sending "black smoke billowing over the area," the Erie Daily Times reported, infuriating Harborcreek officials, including the fire chief who filed charges against the railroad

NICK WARREN



Disasters like East Palestine can be avoided in the future with better regulation, which can be a politically charged concept. In Erie, the power of regulation was demonstrated in the shutdown of the Erie Coke plant, after years of Clean Air Act violations.

and salvage company, only to find out that they had been given permission to burn the cars by the Pennsylvania Department of Environment Resources (which in 1995 was split into the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Department of Environmental Protection). The fire chief responded that he strongly objected to “outsiders coming into Harborcreek and violating the laws township people live with.”

In May 1980, in the middle of the night, a Conrail train derailed by a housing project near Pittsburgh Avenue in Erie, rupturing a tank that the conductor initially reported was leaking the extremely toxic vinyl chloride. Fortunately, according to reports, the conductor had misread his chart and the tipped tanker had spilled over 10,000 gallons of the non-toxic, non-flammable propylene glycol instead.

Still, it was enough to get the attention of Mayor Louis J. Tullio, who stated that while preparations for such disasters were ultimately the county’s responsibility, he wasn’t opposed to the city having a plan as well. “The potential exists for a major disaster,” he noted. “We should be prepared.”

In 1987, Pennsylvania U.S. Senator Arlen Specter spoke before the Senate Commerce Committee arguing that trains carrying hazardous materials simply should not go through populated areas. “These accidents are occurring more frequently and are an increasing peril to residents of our cities,” stated Specter.

In response, Erie County Executive Judy Lynch noted it wasn’t that simple. Specter was well-intentioned, she believed, but despite significant concerns, Erie County industries also *relied on* many of these dangerous chemicals. It was *knowledge* Lynch de-

sired, not necessarily an outright ban. “We have to understand what is coming through the county and being used by industries here,” she told the Erie Daily Times. “[W]e have to have plans.”

The county was simply ill-equipped. The only hazardous material response team were volunteers that were “understaffed and under equipped” and operated out of an “old van,” she said. This was especially a concern, director of the Erie County Emergency Management Agency Nick Sleptzoff told the Erie Daily Times, as on Interstate 90 alone he estimated that around 800 shipments of hazardous materials crossed Erie County each day — *not* including what

passed through by freight or water.

“If we knew about some of the stuff moving on I-90, it would probably curl our hair,” Sleptzoff told Jack Grazier of the Erie Daily Times the following year. “[B]ut unless something happens involving one of those shipments, we have no knowledge of what’s going on.” He added that Erie had been lucky so far, but the luck wouldn’t last forever. “It will happen,” he stressed. “We will have one. ... [T]he potential for disaster increases each day.”

It almost happened near Elgin, just outside of Corry, Pa. in 1988. A train tanker carrying 36 tons of the explosive, toxic, and carcinogenic toluene diisocyanate broke away from its train. The conductor, who was aboard, tried to stop it from rolling, but the hand brake failed. He had to jump from the tanker before it tipped off the rails. Fortunately, the tanker did not rupture and there was no spill.

“It’s frightening when you think about that particular chemical,” Sleptzoff told the Erie Daily Times afterwards. “We might have had to evacuate the entire Corry area.”

Around this time, Erie Congressman Tom Ridge had his office attempt to get details from Conrail on what was coming through Erie, but Conrail officials stated it simply wasn’t possible. Moving into the last decade of the 20th century, the newspapers continued covering derailments and close calls: an Akron, Ohio fire involving four cars carrying butane, leading to hospitalizations and citywide school closures. Twenty-nine cars derailed in Craigsville, Pa., a rural community between Butler and Kittanning, in April 1990 resulting in an explosion and fire and crude oil dumping into their town’s primary creek.

And so on.

Of course, time and time again, fingers have been pointed at railroad companies having significant freedom to self-regulate — sometimes referred to as “performance-based regulations.” This allows the railroads to set their own performance goals and plans for achieving them, rather than having a government regulation that, for example, all freight trains must



This photo from the Environmental Protection Agency shows crash site recovery operations in East Palestine, Ohio where a Norfolk Southern train derailed in February and spilled toxic vinyl chloride into the surrounding environment.

have a certain type of braking system (which could, naturally, eat into corporate profits).

It's the age-old battle between those who wish to regulate and those who see regulation as a financial hindrance to business. In Erie, the power of the regulators was demonstrated in recent years with the Erie Coke plant, which was sued and shut down outright by the state after years of defiant Clean Air Act violations. In other cases, regulations fell short, such as in 2016 when it was reported by Ed Palattella in the Erie Times-News that the federal government had approved 150 trucks of "high-level liquid nuclear waste" to travel from Ontario through Erie County on Interstates 90 and 79 on its route to a processing plant in South Carolina.

The reality is that the term itself, *regulation*, is politically-loaded, like most things in the public discourse. Regulations should not be viewed as a simplistic collective ("regulations are bad!") and should instead be viewed individually. What purpose does a regulation serve? Who benefits (and who doesn't) from an active or proposed regulation? If given the option between profits and doing the right thing, what choices will a corporation make? These are conversations that hark back to the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 and continued throughout Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the regulatory laws of the Nixon administration, the *deregulation* under Presidents Carter and Reagan, and through the debates, arguments, and lobbying of today.

Since the East Palestine incident, Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and J.D. Vance (R-OH) have proposed rail safety legislation. In explaining it, Brown argued that fines simply weren't enough of an incentive (those \$6.5 billion in stock buybacks over the past two years for Norfolk Southern aren't helping with the perception). Brown and Vance's proposal demands increased safety requirements, new braking system

Time and time again, fingers have been pointed at railroad companies having significant freedom to self-regulate — sometimes referred to as "performance-based regulations." This allows the railroads to set their own performance goals and plans for achieving them, rather than having a government regulation that, for example, all freight trains must have a certain type of braking system (which could, naturally, eat into corporate profits).

rules, and two-person crews must be made mandatory. Prevention, after all, is preferable to reaction.

Accidents are inevitable. The goal is to ensure that avoidable ones do not occur. When they do happen though, communities must be prepared. Plans should be in place. Proper funding should be provided. Com-

munication will be key.

The Erie County Department of Public Safety did not respond to requests for more information for this story, but the county has a web page dedicated to Emergency Management and another explaining the county's Haz-Mat Team, which in 2021 received a new Freightliner Command Bus. First responders also now have access to an app called CrewForce which provides "access to mission-critical information in real time." With cell phone availability, instructions could also be quickly communicated to the general public faster than in previous decades.

These incidents create understandable skepticism and distrust towards corporations, institutions, and bureaucracies, but they also provide an opportunity for bipartisan cooperation by our lawmakers — as long as citizens continue to put on the pressure, continuously, year after year, and long after the media circus wanes and attention moves elsewhere.

The shipment of hazardous materials via train is nothing new, nor is their frequent derailment. Learn more in this archived Erie Reader story from 2016 by Lisa Gensheimer entitled "Bomb Trains: Pipelines on Wheels" (eriereader.com/article/bomb-trains-pipelines-on-wheels)

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



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FEATURE

Making Green Waves in Erie Composting

Erie has a new avenue for composting with Green Waves Compost

By: Jordan Coon

One of the biggest causes of excess waste in America is food. Approximately 40 percent of all food in America is discarded, according to data from Feeding America. Other studies show that nearly 42 billion tons of food are thrown away each year in the U.S., putting us second only to Australia for the highest food waste rate globally, and contributing to 8 percent of all greenhouse gases emitted in that department, according to earth.org.

When food waste is sent to the landfill, the nutrients never have the opportunity to return to the soil. In fact, those materials that end up in the landfill create methane gas while decomposing. Methane is 25 times more potent and efficient at trapping heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide.

Enter Allison Lucas, who is a mom here in Erie, and who is scared for her daughter's future. She started Green Waves Compost in hopes that she could lower the impact of her food waste and, consequently, the greenhouse gases that waste emits.

"I never planned on having kids, mainly because of my disappointment in the state of humanity, but now that I have her, my mindset has shifted. I have to try to teach her to be tenacious in our attempts to make a difference no matter how big or small." Lucas says.

She continues, "Composting at home can be very simple to learn, and Green

Waves offers all the necessary equipment to get you started on your difference-making journey. We offer weekly collection services with options of two or four gallon bins, and biweekly services that include a two gallon bin."

Navigating how to help the planet can be tough sometimes, but adding the habit of composting is a quick and easy way to start. Lucas, who happens to be the only employee of Green Waves Composting, makes it simple by doing most of it for you — from providing the bins, to picking up waste, and seeing it through to final compost. Customers can choose plans based on their individual needs: biweekly pickup in a two gallon receptacle is \$18/month, weekly pickup in a two gallon receptacle is \$32/month, and weekly pickup with a four gallon receptacle is \$40/month.

All compost that is created as a result of this collected food waste will either go back to the individual customers for use in their gardens or be redistributed throughout community gardens in Erie. With Green Waves Composting taking marked steps towards improving the food waste situation in Erie, clients can expect to rest easy knowing that their food will be wasted no more.

To reach Allison and Green Waves Compost you can call 814-580-6682, email at a.lucas@greenwavescompost.com, visit greenwavescompost.com.



Allison Lucas, owner and sole employee of Green Waves Composting, felt called to help make the world better after the birth of her daughter. Green Waves makes composting your food scraps simple, reducing food waste in the landfill.

Protecting Wildlife Starts in Our Own Backyards

Tamarack Wildlife Rehab Center offers tips for keeping wildlife families safe

By: Amy VanScoter

Spring is finally here and as the weather starts to warm up, usually one of the first things we notice are the birds chirping again in the morning. Our local wildlife are beginning to raise their families during this time of year and there are several things that you can do to make sure they get off to the best start.

“One of the first things that people can do is to postpone any tree work until August through November to best protect wildlife. Some small birds and squirrels depend on tree cavities over winter,” said Carol Holmgren, executive director and licensed wildlife rehabilitator at Tamarack Wildlife Rehab Center. “If a tree is felled and baby squirrels are discovered, it may still be possible to reunite the family. Mother squirrels will have several nests, so if you do find squirrels she will likely retrieve her babies.” Holmgren says that you can place the babies in a box with an open lid in a warm place and wait 3-4 hours for mom to come back. If she hasn't returned by then, you can contact the center but resist the urge to feed or give water as it can cause digestive upset or pneumonia. Tamarack treated 160 squirrels last year. Holmgren explained the best outcomes were ones where the babies had not been given anything to eat or drink.

Another way we can help is to plant native plants in our yards and properties. “Native plants support native insects which provide food for our wildlife. Songbirds especially need our caterpillars to feed their young,” explained Holmgren. “Baby songbirds need to be fed every 20-30 minutes for 14 hours a day. If a songbird nest has fallen, or a baby has fallen from the nest, it's not unusual to be able to reunite a family and we are always willing to coach people and help them handle a situation. Our goal is to keep wild families together,” said Holmgren.

“Many young fledglings will leave the nest before they are willing to fly. They are healthy, just not old enough yet to fly,” Holmgren explained. She says they should be standing up and able to hop around. “Any raptors — hawks, falcons, and owl nestlings found on the ground should be brought to a wildlife rehabilitator. They can be placed in a box. If by



Injured wildlife can now receive better care at Tamarack Wildlife Center with their latest acquisition of a digital x-ray machine. Here, technicians x-ray the injured wing of a bald eagle to track her healing process.

chance you find an eagle, notifying the PA Game Commission is required, since an endangered species is involved. “Raptors fall from greater heights and have more body mass so they are more prone to injury and danger,” said Holmgren. Tamarack may try to unite the raptor back with their family, try to rehabilitate the bird, or unite it with a wild foster family.

As you start your gardens this year, you may discover rabbit nests and think the baby cottontails need help because you don't see any adult rabbits around. “Mothers are away during the day and return at dawn and dusk for feeding,” said Holmgren. “She has a lot of scent, so she stays away to protect them.” If you do disturb a nest, cover the area back up. Holmgren suggests placing a string or sticks in a tic-tac-toe shape to be able to check later and see if the mother has been back. To protect a nest of rabbits from the family dog, Holmgren suggests either keeping the dog leashed or on a line for a couple of weeks while the babies grow up, or covering the nest with a laundry basket during the day to protect them, removing it in the evening.

Most cottontails are completely independent in 15-21 days. There is usually something wrong if you can approach adult wildlife but young cottontails can sometimes be easily approached. This does not mean you should or that

they need our help. Cats outdoors can also pose a danger to songbirds and baby cottontails. Holmgren suggests leashing them or keeping them inside. Any animal caught by a cat needs treatment and antibiotics. Cottontails are seen quite frequently at Tamarack — about 350 were treated last year. Highly skilled volunteers are required to feed and monitor the babies in a very quiet, dark, low stress environment.

When you are out on the roads this spring, try to avoid hitting turtles if you see them crossing the road. If it is safe to do so, you can help them cross. Turtles always have a destination in mind and you should always move them in the direction in which they are traveling. Tamarack does some shell repair if you find a turtle in the wild who has an injured shell, but it is important to remember exactly where the turtle was found so that it can be returned to its habitat once healthy.

Another frequent visitor to Tamarack is the Virginia opossum. They have become quite popular wildlife because they typically don't carry rabies, are North America's only marsupial, are omnivores, and they are nature's clean-up crew, so they eat most everything that humans consider a nuisance. Opossums are also immune to snake venom. Sometimes an infant opossum is seen if the mother gets hit by a car since the babies travel on their moth-

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CONTRIBUTED



If you find injured wildlife or abandoned baby animals or birds, give them their best chance of survival by not giving them food or water, and keeping them in a dark, secure box with small air holes until you can get them to the rehabilitation center.

er or in her pouch. “If you find a baby opossum that is less than seven inches long from nose to butt, not including the tail and it is not with the mother, it needs help,” said Holmgren. She said they treated about 200 opossums last year.

Tamarack offers a Wildlife First Responders Course online each February that teaches when to intervene and when not to, as well as how to capture, stabilize, and transport injured wildlife to a rehabilitator. In addition to learning how to respond when encountering

wildlife in need, participants develop some of the skills necessary to become Tamarack volunteers. The course can be used towards state licensure and as a capture/transport permittee, as well. You can find more information about the course on their website.

Injured wildlife has a higher chance of surviving if you do the following: no food or water, keep the wildlife in a safe, dark, quiet and warm place such as a cardboard box with small air holes and paper towels on the bottom (avoid peeking to help reduce their stress lev-

els).

Wildlife with injuries are now receiving improved care when they arrive at Tamarack due to a recently acquired on-site digital x-ray machine. The Erie Community Foundation, Crawford Heritage Community Foundation, Kenneth A. Scott Charitable Trust, a Key-Bank Trust, and other supporters have provided the funds necessary for wildlife patients to be able to be diagnosed in just minutes with this technology. The images can then be emailed to supporting veterinarians or other experts for interpretation. Previously patients had to be taken to area veterinary clinics for x-rays. This meant that only a very small fraction of Tamarack’s many patients could get x-rays due to the expense, staff time, and stress on the animal during transport to a veterinary clinic.

“We are always looking to improve and Tamarack’s x-ray equipment is already improving patient care,” said Holmgren. “Since no extra expense is incurred when we take additional images, we have been able to x-ray patients that may not have received one in the past. A Cooper’s hawk from Erie admitted in December was unable to fly but had no fractures that could be felt in a physical exam. The x-ray revealed a fractured bone in his shoulder girdle, which responded well to treatment once diagnosed,” she said. That bird was released back to its Erie home in late January.

For a red-tailed hawk with a wing fracture, follow-up x-rays taken mid-treatment showed that bone healing was proceeding more slowly than was typical, so his time in a splint was extended. For an eagle with a swollen foot and wound, the diagnostic x-ray confirmed there was no bone infection involved with the injury, so the patient

had a promising prognosis and was able to receive less aggressive treatment, and no oral antibiotics or surgery were needed.

Erie is home to many types of birds and wildlife with the Lake Erie shoreline being a vital path for migrating birds this time of year. Tamarack has partnered with the Erie Bird Observatory in monitoring migratory birds who are often thrown off by reflective glass on buildings downtown or by interior and exterior city lights, which can disorient the birds. This new project called BirdSafe Erie is recruiting volunteers to walk specific morning routes April through May looking for injured or dead birds. You can find more information about this program at eriebirdobservatory.org/birdsafe-erie.

Spring is the perfect time to familiarize yourself with all of the wildlife living in your neighborhood. “Get outside and enjoy the wildlife. Our area is full of migratory birds, screech owls, great horned owls, red-tailed hawks, and peregrine falcons,” said Holmgren.

Tamarack Wildlife Center offers professional, licensed wildlife rehabilitation at no cost to the finder. TWC is a 501(c)3 not for profit organization supported by individual and corporate donors and does not receive state or federal funding. You can find more information on their website tamarackwildlife.org. Tamarack is also on Facebook and Instagram @tamarackwildlife.

Amy VanScoter is a local yoga teacher and communications professional who can often be found outdoors enjoying wildlife and staring at the sky looking for hawks. She can be reached at avanscoter@gmail.com

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Gem City Style: April 2023 Earth Day

A Q&A with Jen Salem, horticulture specialist for the Regional Science Consortium

By: Jessica Hunter

Jessica Hunter (JH): Jen, please tell us a little bit about your background as a horticulture specialist for the NWPA region and your work with the Tom Ridge Environmental Center.

Jen Salem (JS): My career in horticulture didn't begin until I was in my thirties. I had taken a part-time job at a family-owned greenhouse in Fairview, and from the first day there, I knew I wanted to work with plants the rest of my life. Going back to school wasn't an option for me, so I looked for every opportunity to educate myself about plants. The greenhouse owners were willing to teach me about every aspect of the business, and I am so grateful to them for sharing their knowledge. I took the Penn State Master Gardener course, and was offered a job as Garden Coordinator at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center (TREC) in 2012. A few years later, I transitioned to my current position at the Regional Science Consortium, which is located in TREC.

JH: You were recently involved in an exhibit on the research and restoration of wetlands at the Blasco Memorial Library displaying until May 31, 2023. Can you shed some light on that project and why it's good for the community to be aware?

JS: Wetlands are often considered "waste" places, but they provide a long list of environmental services to nearby communities. By sharing my perspective of a wetland in the library exhibit, I'm

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Jen Salem, horticulture specialist for the Regional Science Consortium, is pictured at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center with thriving native plants that she grows for their eventual installation in six priority wetland sites on Presque Isle.

hoping to shed light on what wetlands are, what they do, and how we can improve wetlands near us.

JH: Your involvement in the wetland restoration is extensive. Can you talk

about your work at Leo's Landing on Presque Isle State Park? What are some of the benefits to restoring wetlands?

JS: The Wetland Restoration project on Presque Isle State Park involves so many

partners. The Regional Science Consortium (RSC) has several roles, including biological monitoring in the wetlands (amphibians, fish, mussels and macros) and plant propagation of native wetland plants. My part of the project involves growing and installing plants in our six priority wetland sites, including the location at Leo's Landing. We grow plants from seeds and cuttings that are collected on Presque Isle; these new plants go right back in the park as soon as they are mature enough to be planted. The benefits that we observe in our restoration sites include an improvement in native plant diversity, the reduction of invasive plant species, and increased presence and diversity of wildlife.

JH: Jen, you are also the founder of Go Native Erie, a program that works under the Regional Science Consortium and Tom Ridge Environmental Center as part of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which promotes the environmental health of the Great Lakes. What was your inspiration for creating this program?

JS: I've been a plant enthusiast for a long time, and I started my journey with plants the same way everyone else

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Jen Salem and her colleagues grow native plants from seeds and cuttings taken from specific locations on Presque Isle, including Leo's Landing. Those new plants, once mature enough, are then transplanted on site to encourage native species growth in wetland areas.

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Currently on display on the second floor of the Blasco library is a diorama of a native wetland biome sponsored by the Regional Science Consortium, with the aim to educate the public about wetlands and how we can help improve them.

does...grow what's easy, grow what's pretty, and grow what you can get for free from your neighbors (not always a great choice, by the way). As I began researching plant species, I discovered that a plant's origin makes a difference.

tions for the public.

JH: I see that you never stop growing in the greenhouse at TREC even during off-season, where you are conducting plant trials and research. My question for you is if you could fill the greenhouse

“As I began researching plant species, I discovered that a plant's origin makes a difference. Plants that are native to an area have evolved with other indigenous living things to form close, life-sustaining relationships. The benefits native plants provide an ecosystem are truly astounding. Go Native Erie! (GNE) grew from this realization. I wanted to spread the word about native plants, and being a lifelong Erie resident, I wanted to start here.” ~ Jen Salem, horticulture specialist at the Regional Science Consortium

Plants that are native to an area have evolved with other indigenous living things to form close, life-sustaining relationships. The benefits native plants provide an ecosystem are truly astounding. Go Native Erie! (GNE) grew from this realization. I wanted to spread the word about native plants, and being a lifelong Erie resident, I wanted to start here. GNE now has native gardens all over PA and into New York. Our programs include a native plant sale (virtual this year, again), which is celebrating its 11th year, and many exhibits, classes and presenta-

all year with your favorite native species, what would it be and why?

JS: That's a difficult question because there are so many native species to love! I think I would choose a pollinator plant, because pollinators certainly need our help. Of course that would include maples and oaks (host plants for many butterflies), milkweeds, asters, mountain mints and dogwoods, to name a few. My garden always has room for more native plants!

Jessica Hunter can be found at jessica-hunterphotos.com



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An Evening with Gaëtane Verna

100th Erie Art Museum Juror to speak at PennWest

By: Heather Amancio, Erin Magnus, and Violet Vance

Gaëtane Verna, the executive director of the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, juried the 100th annual Nicole and Harry Martin Spring Show at the invitation of the Erie Art Museum and PennWest Edinboro Bruce Gallery's Visiting Artist and Speaker Endowment committee (VASE).

In addition to serving as the juror, Verna will deliver the 2023 VASE talk, a free public event. Verna's talk will focus on curation — the act of selecting works for an exhibition. Verna will speak at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, April 12 in Edinboro at PennWest University's Alexander Music Hall, located near the Cole Memorial Auditorium. Verna's talk will be followed by a conversation with PennWest political science professor Dr. Rhonda Matthews, moderated by Allegheny College art history professor Dr. Paula Burleigh.

Inclusivity has become an increasingly central topic in contemporary art, but it has always been central to Gaëtane Verna's curatorial approach to exhibitions. Born in 1965 to Haitian parents in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Verna built her career in the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec, lending her an innate understanding of intersectionality and multiculturalism.

Showcasing the talent of artists based in Northwest Pennsylvania and the surrounding region, the 2023 Spring Show covers wide ground in both media and content. Sculptures are interspersed throughout the gallery and the walls bear an impressive array of paintings, prints, drawings, video, and mixed media artworks. Some artists included in the Spring Show address topics such as industrialism, environmental issues, and politics, while others used art to express facets of identity, culture, and subjective experience.

During our Zoom interview with Verna, she expressed an appreciation for the creativity of the artists who submitted work. Institutional accessibility for artists is at the forefront of Verna's curatorial philosophy. She views her role in any institution, big or small, as a way to "be of service to artists ... present their works and enable them to make new works."

Throughout her career, Verna has come to view art institutions as being in service of artistic expression. She works to make exhibitions significant for artists, creating opportunities for makers to experiment and grow their practice and engage with the surrounding community. Verna commented that institutions can help connect artists to communities by offering artist talks, guided tours, and providing impactful wall texts. These supports ensure that viewers are able to share in the understanding of each work and the exhibitions in their entirety. "It's nice to have a multiplicity of touchpoints," Verna explained.

Verna approaches art with a sense of openness. The successful design of an inclusive exhibition, in her words, incorporates "room for everyone to get something out of it." She doesn't curate exhibitions with the intention of giving viewers all the answers, instead "allowing the viewer to finish the work on their own."

Verna's approach to interpretation and meaning helps her achieve her goal of supporting artists. When viewers arrive at their own destination from an artwork, they become supporters of the artist in their own way. Whether they invest in the artist by purchasing their work and living with it in their home, or simply by talking about the art and sharing it with other members of their community — the viewer is empowered to become more involved in art.

This year's Spring Show reflects these philosophies of inclusivity and viewer engagement. When selecting artworks for the Spring Show, Verna described her process as intuitive, choosing works that resonated with her and left space for dialogue between artists and viewers. She wanted to assemble a selection of work exhibiting an array of artistic approaches. Thus, she chose to include art that she felt displayed a thoughtful balance between material and content.

Verna's early career began in a one room gallery at Bishop's University in Québec. "When you work in a smaller organization, you get to do so much more," Verna said. That's where a toolbox of knowledge is built. "I remember in my first position, I used to take out the vinyl text and install it. I mean, don't ask me to do it now because I would probably cry, but at least I know I can do it because I did it so many times."

While Verna's current directorial role allows her to focus on organization, planning, and fundraising, her early career experiences contribute to her appreciation for the work technicians put into exhibitions. She also recognizes that the labor involved in turning curatorial visions into reality in the gallery space is often undervalued. "I will never belittle those tasks, because I know that they're important to the well-being of the exhibition," Verna said.

Following her start at Bishop's University in 1999, Verna worked for the Musée d'art de Joliette (2006-2012) and the Toronto Power Plant (2012-2022), before starting at the Wexner Center (2022-present). This year, she was selected by artist Kapwani Kiwanga to curate the Canadian Pavilion at the 2024 La Biennale di Venezia,

CONTRIBUTED



Gaëtane Verna was the juror for the 100th Annual Spring Show currently on display at the Erie Art Museum, featuring work from regional artists. Her selection of the pieces in the show reflect Verna's philosophies of inclusion and viewer engagement.

the largest and oldest international art exhibition.

"I'm very honored and I want to do everything for that to be the best experience for [Kiwanga]," Verna said. "I'm going to be really busy preparing for that, which I think is going to be the experience of a lifetime, because, to be chosen by an artist, and then to represent your country at the Venice Biennale — I take it very seriously."

In addition to curating the Canadian pavilion in Venice, Verna will travel to Pennsylvania to give a lecture about her career experiences, "Curating: Essential Work — The Essence of Work." About this topic, Verna commented, "I hope, through my talk, to inspire you to understand that wherever you are you can make an impact" and to "do great work even if you think no one is looking."

Co-authors Heather Amancio and Erin Magnus are students at Allegheny College; Violet Vance is a senior at PennWest Edinboro. VASE 2023 committee members are: Bruce Gallery director Lisa Austin, art education professor Dr. Mary Elizabeth Meier, and graphic and interactive design professor Derek Witucki.

Verna's VASE talk will be streamed via the webinar link shared at: BruceGallery.info. For more information, contact Lisa Austin at laustin@pennwest.edu

FTD PHOTOGRAPHY



The Nicole and Harry Martin Spring Show at the Erie Art Museum marks the 100th version of the yearly exhibition featuring regional artists. Gaëtane Verna was the juror for this year's show.



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Flagship City Comedy Fest
The following events are presented by the Flagship City Comedy Fest.

Casey Kuftic and Friends
April 27 @ 6pm
Edinboro VFD Station 38

Learnmore Jonasi
April 28 @ 9:30pm
10/20 Collective

Late Night Laughs
April 29 @ 10:30pm
April 30 @ 12:30am
10/20 Collective

Room 33 Showcase
April 27 @ 7pm
Room 33

Not Your Grandmas Brunch
April 29 @ 11am
10/20 Collective

Heavenly Brunch
April 30 @ 11am
10/20 Collective

Calimari's Showcase
April 28 @ 7pm
Calamari's Squid Row

Hot Jokes
April 29 @ 5pm
Black Monk Brewery

Inked Comedy
April 30 @ 3pm
Andromeda Studios

Brent Terhune
April 29 @ 8:30pm
Sheraton

Kristen Becker
April 30 @ 6:30pm
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EVENTS

International Music Star Angélique Kidjo to Host Showstopping MIAC Live Concert

Five-time Grammy Award winner comes to Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center

THURSDAY, APR. 13

Angélique Kidjo is one of the greatest artists in international music today — a creative force, with 16 albums to her name. Most recently, Kidjo was the recipient of 2023 Polar Music Prize, becoming the third African to be awarded this prestigious music award. *Time* has called her “Africa’s premier diva” and named her one of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2021. The BBC has included her on their list of the 50 most iconic figures and, in 2011, The Guardian listed her as one of their “Top 100 Most Inspiring Women in the World.” *Forbes* has ranked Kidjo as the first woman in their list of the “Most Powerful Celebrities in Africa.” She was the recipient of the prestigious 2015 Crystal Award given by the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the 2016 Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award, the 2018 German Sustainability Award, and the 2023 Vilcek Prize in Music.

Kidjo travels the world advocating on behalf of children as a UNICEF and Oxfam goodwill ambassador. At the G7 Summit in 2019, President Macron of

France named Kidjo as the spokesperson for the AFAWA (Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa) initiative to help close the financial gap for women entrepreneurs in Africa. She has also created her own charitable foundation, Batonga, dedicated to supporting the education of young girls in Africa.

Her striking voice, stage presence, and fluency in multiple languages has won respect from her peers and expanded her following internationally. Kidjo has cross-pollinated the West African traditions of her childhood in Benin with elements of American R&B, funk, and jazz, as well as influences from European and Latin American music.

Kidjo’s recent albums include *Celia* (2019), a tribute to Cuban singer Celia Cruz which won the 2020 Grammy for Best World Music Album, and *Mother Nature* (2021) which features collaborations with many young African producers and singers.

Brett Johnson, Ph.D. Director of Mercyhurst Theatre Program said, “We’re thrilled that five-time Grammy Award-winning artist and activist An-

CONTRIBUTED



Five-time Grammy Award winner Angélique Kidjo is coming to the Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center at Mercyhurst University. Her full range of vocal talents and energetic dancing set to world music will be featured for one evening only.

gélique Kidjo is coming to Mercyhurst University. Her powerful voice, boisterous dancing, and radiant energy are certain to have patrons on their feet, moving to the groove of her genre-de-

fying music.” — Michael Hull
7:30 p.m. // Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. // \$20-\$45 // Tickets and information: mercyhurst.edu/events

Double Up with This American Song's April Release Show

Local rockers celebrate two new record releases with free show at PACA

SATURDAY, APR. 15

Join longtime local original favorite This American Song for a free event as the band celebrates the release of its two newest recordings, their *Connect the Dots* EP and *Exile on State Street*, a full length live album. “We want this to feel more like a party and celebration of songs than a traditional rock and roll show,” says guitarist and lead vocalist Jeff Phillips. “We want everyone who is willing and able to come out and enjoy the night with us.”

Originally formed around 13 years ago, This American Song started out as a creative outlet for Jeff Phillips and John Johnston (lead guitar, vocals) before growing to add bass and drums to become the band that began playing shows and recording in 2010. After several years, a horn section was added to the mix, which eventually led to the version of the band we know today.

Those years haven't been without their struggle, though, making both of these albums significant milestones for the band. Aside from pandemic-related dif-

ficulties, they experienced further disruption when two long-time members stepped away in the past few years, causing uncertainty for how the band would move forward. From this came *Connect the Dots*, a collection of songs created during this period of upheaval.

Shortly after, the current lineup was formed and practice began, resulting in tremendous growth for the band before beginning to play live shows again. “The *Exile on State Street (Live at PACA)* album is a perfect representation of the work that we did together over that year, bridging the former version of This American Song into where we are now,” states Phillips.

Set to be a night of fun and entertainment, supporting acts include Fred Oakman & The Flood, Optimistic Apocalypse, and Bummer Country. Phillips mentions that each of these bands are good friends and will be a great fit for providing a fantastic night of music for all to enjoy.

Rounding out This American Song alongside Jeff Phillips and John Johnston are Jesse Guerrein (trumpet, vo-

DAVE SCHROEDER



Pictured on the roof of the PACA building at 1505 State St. are long time original Erie band, This American Song. From left: Brent Knight, Dave Tamulonis, Jeff Phillips, Jesse Guerrein, Larry Wheaton, John Johnston, and Michael Milk.

cals), Brent Knight (drums), Michael Milk (bass, vocals), Dave Tamulonis (keys, violin, vocals), Marissa Litzenberg (saxophone), and Larry Wheaton (trombone, percussion, vocals).

Both releases are available for streaming across platforms and can also be downloaded free on Bandcamp, along with the band's other releases. *Connect*

the Dots cassettes and *Exile on State Street (Live at PACA)* CDs will be available for purchase at the release show, as well as other band merchandise. — Ally Kutz

Doors at 6 p.m., music begins at 7 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // Light refreshments provided while supplies last // Free, donations accepted

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Earth Day Inspires Local Organizations to Think Spring... Cleaning

Public cleanup events popping up throughout Erie community

By: Erin Phillips

As Erie's winter gives way to spring and the (thankfully, small amount) of snow melts away, we are left with a stark reminder that littering is alive and well. The remnants of the winter season always include a hefty amount of discarded detritus like cigarette butts, drink containers, and the unnameable, half-rotten debris of a season gone by. Earth Day just so happens to coincide with the beginning of spring — and so in the spirit of both Earth Day and spring cleaning, a number of local organizations plan to roll up their sleeves, and host their own public spring cleanup events.

Of course, one never needs a formal event to get out and help clean up our beaches, parks, sidewalks, or even just our own yards. But, if you need a little extra motivation to get out and do your part, please feel free to join in the following public cleanup events and help make sure our Gem City shines.

Sierra Club of Erie Annual Spring Cleanup - Saturday, Apr. 15

The Lake Erie Group of the Sierra Club, a national grassroots environmental organization, serves Erie, Clarion, Crawford, Forest, Venango, and Warren counties and oversees two environmentally important assets: Lake Erie and the Allegheny National Forest. The group (which is smallest in Pennsylvania in terms of membership) regularly sponsors events to keep its membership involved in the community. They will be hosting their 22nd annual spring cleanup, which will initiate at the Waterford Hotel parking lot at 9 a.m. (213 High St. Waterford) and, from there, disperse to the assigned cleaning areas. Gloves, garbage bags, and safety vests will be provided.

Frontier Improvement Association Spring Cleanup - Saturday, Apr. 15

If you live or recreate in or around the Frontier neighborhood, consider joining their neighborhood association and help clean up the streets, berms, boulevards, and parks from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

On Jan. 5, 1931, a group of property owners within Frontier Place chartered the Frontier Improvement Association to "provide for the proper care of the streets, avenues and roads, shrubbery, public places ... and to promote the common good of the residents and owners of said lots and to improve the use and enjoyment thereof within the subdivision known as the Frontier Place Subdivision." The Frontier Improvement Association is continuing on this historic mission with their spring cleanup and can use any and all help.

Spring Cleanup at the Battles Farmhouses - Apr. 16, 17, and 18

The Erie County Historical Society and Hagen History Center are hosting their annual Spring Cleanup at the Battles Farmhouse properties in Girard, Pa. The properties at 306 and 436 Walnut St. sit on more



Students from a Gannon University fraternity join fellow Gannon students, along with residents and volunteers during Our West Bayfront's annual spring cleanup.

than 130 acres of farmland, including nearly a mile of public walking trails and it will all need to be de-littered. Additionally, the History Center is accepting volunteers to help refresh the Battles buildings. Project Manager Pam Parker adds, "Staff and volunteers will be scraping, painting, and landscaping for three days. We will provide free lunch to volunteers. To sign up, please email Adam Macrino amacrino@eriehistory.org with the day you will be available."

Our West Bayfront Spring Cleanup - Saturday, Apr. 22

Each year, Our West Bayfront employees and volunteers, citizens of the neighborhood, and students and staff from Gannon University team up to hit the streets and public parks comprising the West Bayfront to pick up trash and ready the neighborhood for spring. Anna Franz, executive director of Our West Bayfront comments, "The Our West Bayfront Spring Cleanup is held every year in conjunction with Gannon University's Day of Caring. It's a great morning of students working alongside residents to deal with some of the litter and debris that has accumulated over the winter. It's really nice to see neighbors getting together after what is usually (but perhaps less this year) a long cold winter. People are happy to be out, getting something done in the neighborhood!" Volunteers should meet at Gridley Park on West Sixth and Poplar streets from 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. to obtain directions, a trash bag, and gloves.

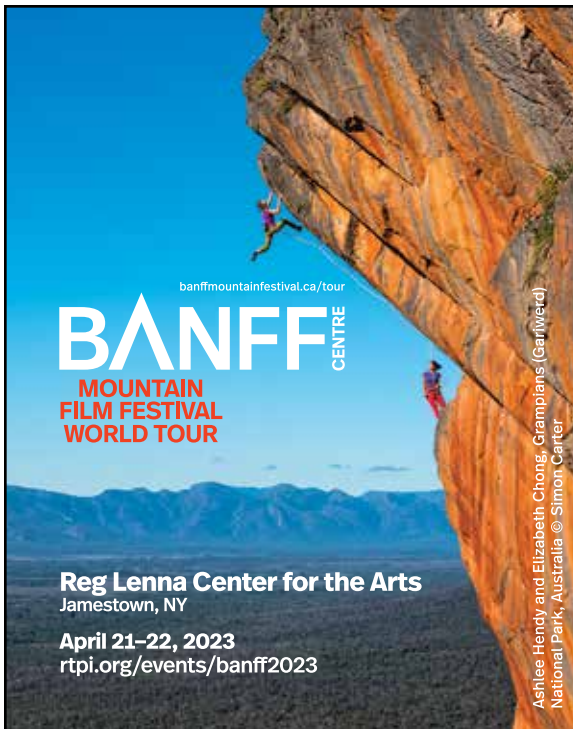
Erie Downtown Partnership Spring Cleanup - Saturday, Apr. 22

Cleaning up the city should inevitably include the downtown corridor, and the folks at Erie Downtown Partnership (EDP) are partnering with Gannon University student volunteers for their Day of Caring to help gather up trash in the areas closest to their campus. Interested community volunteers should meet at the EDP's offices at 140 E. Fifth St at 9 a.m. for supplies (the event concludes at 12 p.m.). The cleanup will focus on the downtown areas of the Bayfront as well as the 10th Street corridor. Additionally, the EDP and the City of Erie will be hosting a ceremonial volunteer tree planting in Perry Square for Arbor Day on Saturday, April 29 at 12 p.m.

Presque Isle's 62nd Spring Cleanup - Saturday, Apr. 28

This annual event draws hundreds of volunteers to help clean up our most important natural resource in Erie: the beaches of Presque Isle State Park. Organized by the S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie, Presque Isle Partnership, The Great Pennsylvania Clean-Up, and PA-DCNR staff, this 62nd annual Spring Clean-Up is sure to help make a difference for the health of our beaches and waterways. Meet at the Rotary Pavilion between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. to sign-in, receive bags, gloves, and an assigned location for cleaning up. Lunch will be served for all participants from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Erin Phillips can be reached at erin@eriereader.com



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EVENTS

Erie Philharmonic Brings The Circus To Erie with Troupe Vertigo

A high-flying musical opus

SATURDAY, APR. 15

The Erie Philharmonic is combining the wonder of orchestral music with the thrill of the circus in the final Pops performance of the season featuring Troupe Vertigo. With circus acts choreographed to symphonic music, the group has collaborated with symphonies across the United States and worldwide, and has been highlighted for their unique approach to circus arts by TED, The Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival, and Montreal's Cirque Festival.

"Troupe Vertigo will bring a custom, ensemble-based show where the high caliber cirque acts are woven together seamlessly with each unique musical selection. This will be an evening of stunning physical feats choreographed into works of art," the Philharmonic describes. "Imagine strongmen, aerialists, tightrope walkers, and acrobats all performing on the Warner stage directly in front of the Philharmonic in a night destined to astound and amaze audiences of all ages."

Founded in 2009 by Cirque du Soleil veteran Aloysia Garve and theater director Rex Camphuis, Troupe Vertigo has worked throughout the performing arts world to create shows that combine circus, dance, and theater for symphonic orchestras. This includes collaborations with Baltimore Symphony Orchestra conductor Jack Everle on *Cirque Carmen*, a show set to the George Bizet opera, along with performances with the Phoenix Symphony Orchestra set to the famous ballets *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, and *Cinderella*. Most recently, the



In the final Pops Series performance of the year, the Erie Philharmonic will accompany the astonishing circus arts of Troupe Vertigo. Strongmen, aerialists, tightrope walkers, and acrobats will all perform on the Warner stage.

group worked with composer and Detroit Symphony Orchestra conductor Jeff Tyzik on *Symphonic Cirque Noir*, a show based on his jazz-inspired selections.

Troupe Vertigo also provides community outreach as part of its "Cirque School." Based in Los Angeles, the companion company teaches weekly classes, including student performances, team-building workshops, and pre-professional training for performers. The company is also heavily involved with the entertainment industry, with credits including the films *Pitch Perfect 2* and *Water for Elephants*. — Thomas Taylor

Get In on the Act

Dramashop's One Act Festival

FRIDAY, APR. 21

The one-act play can be traced to ancient Greece, when Euripides wrote a satyr play called *Cyclops* as a humorous conclusion to three emotionally heavy multi-act plays. The art form really grew in popularity during the 19th and 20th centuries, though, and are now a regular part of the standard theater repertoire — and Dramashop is bringing four to the stage, all of them written by local playwrights, directed by local directors, and performed by local actors.

The festival features *Long Lost* by Matthew Crays, directed by Matt Fuchs; *Would You — How My Roommate Turned Into a Hotdog!* by Howard Lang, directed by B.J. Waide; *Take My Hand* by Margo Wolfe, directed by Lisa Simonian; and *Single Book Store* by Brenna Thummler, directed by Alycia Olivar and Anna McJunkin.

Seasoned playwright Margo Wolfe, who wrote *Take My Hand*, lent some insight into her piece, which describes the unique relationship between Death and a Death Doula, who helps to ease humans' passage into oblivion. On writing the play, Wolfe said, "I began the process during lockdown, so I had a lot of time to write and think about death. I mostly thought about the uncertainty and how we often try to hide or run from it, pretend it's not going to happen or that we will be saved somehow." She continues, "We may not know much about death, but we better get comfortable with it, because she is sit-



Pictured is a rehearsal for local playwright Brenna Thummler's play *Single Book Store*, which joins three other one act plays that are written, directed, and performed by local talent for Dramashop's One Act Festival.

ting at the bus stop waiting for us, patiently, and our fear of her will not save us."

All the one-act plays are set to intrigue, immerse, and inspire — both live audiences, on subsequent Fridays and Saturdays starting April 21 through April 29, as well as virtual, with the entire festival available online beginning May 1 through May 15. — Cara Suppa

Premiering Friday, Apr. 21 // 8 p.m. // 1001 State St., Suite 210
// For full performance information and ticket pricing, visit: dramashop.org/one-acts

ANGÉLIQUE KIDJO



Thursday, April 13 | 7:30 p.m.

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Media For Us, By Us: Diverse Communication Outlets in Erie
Panel Discussion with Sonya Byes and Michael Mahler, B.S.

Thursday, 4/20, 7-8:30 p.m. at the JES
"Americans and their Games": Sports in American History Part II: The Tales of Race and Ethnicity
Lecture with JES Scholar-in-Residence Andrew Roth, Ph.D.

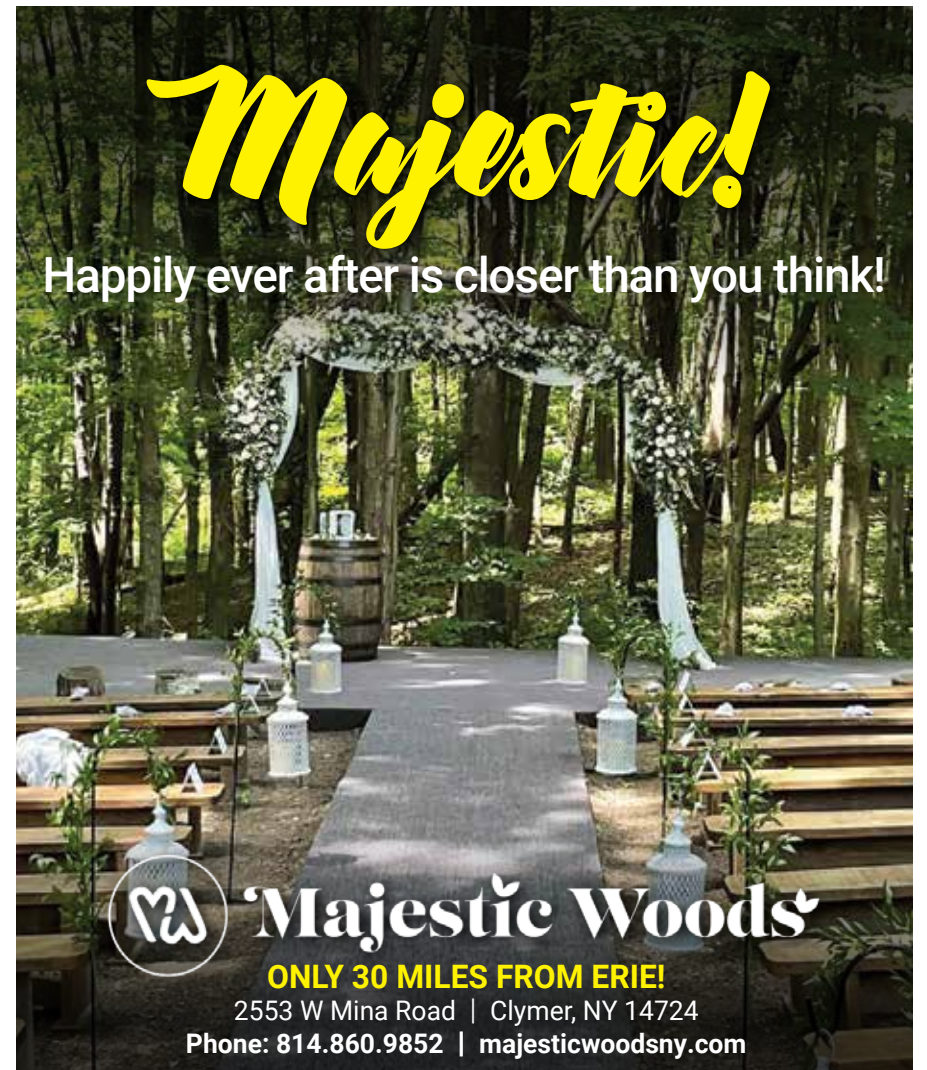
Tuesday, 5/9, 7-8:30 p.m. at the JES
Impact of Social Media on the Capacity of Self-government in a Democracy
Distinguished Visiting Speaker Wendy Schiller, Ph.D.

Thursday, 5/11, 7-8:30 p.m. at the Erie Center for Arts & Technology (ECAT)
You are More than a "Break in Case of Emergency": Knowing the Value of Your Voice When Making Change in Your Community
Distinguished Visiting Speaker Precious McKesson

Tuesday, 5/16, 6-7:30 p.m. at the Corry Higher Education Council
Reimagining Farming in Northwest PA
Visiting Speaker Julie Zajac, MPH

Tuesday, 5/23, 7-8:30 p.m. at the JES
American Presidents and the Constitution
Hagen History Center Lecture Series with Visiting Speaker Ken Gormley, J.D.

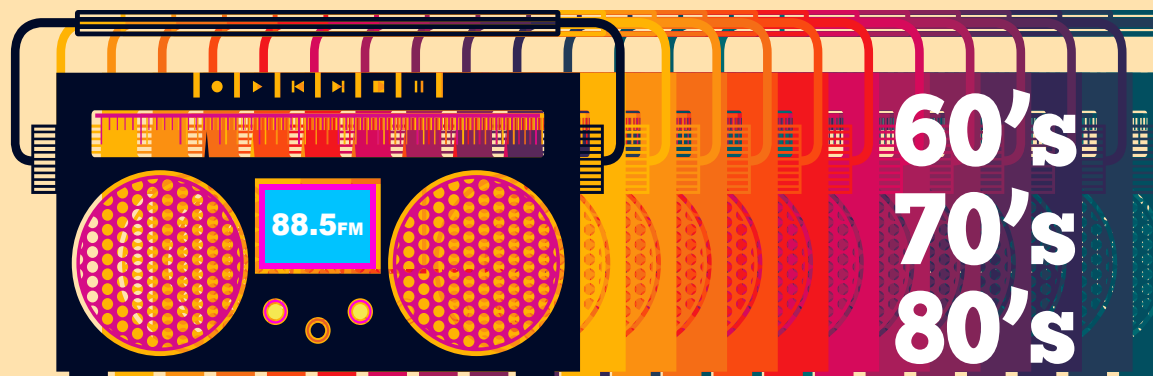
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Flagship City Comedy Fest Sets Sail

Local and national acts descend on Erie for a four-day-long spectacular

BEGINNING THURSDAY, APR. 27

A four-day, home-grown comedy festival spread across seven different venues, the Flagship City Comedy Festival (FCCF) is launching in a big way. For its inaugural year, it will feature headlining events with Brent Terhune, Learnmore Jonasi, and Kristen Becker, in addition to eight other showcases over the course of the weekend. With dozens of comics from across the county, the Flagship City Comedy Fest is poised to be without a doubt the leading event of our local comedy scene.

It should be no surprise why this started in the first place. One of the weekend's organizers, Anthony Morelli of Off Constantly Comedy saw what was happening across the country and thought that "It looked like a lot of fun and something that Erie needed. It also helps Erie understand that comedy is happening around town, because we have so many local comics involved in it." A comedian himself and a 2022 40 Under 40 honoree, Morelli wanted the event "to let you know that good comedy is around."

And around plenty it is.

When performance slots opened earlier this year, the FCCF certainly had their hands full, with more than 40 submissions from all over the country. Some of the local talent includes Casey Kuftic, who will help kick the whole thing off. Morelli noted locals like Jamie Benedi, Brian Bailey, Cheyenne Gaines, Jerry Neilsen, and Brittany Alexis as well as former Erieites like Nicole Walkow are in the mix throughout the weekend, along with fellow event organizer and Off Constantly compatriot Dan Brady.

"We started thinking about it in probably 2021," Morelli notes of Brady and himself. "To have it happen in 2023 is how we wanted to go. Two years was a good amount of time to get it developed and implemented at a small scale this year, but we're planning for the future and I'm already planning 2024 and going to try to make it bigger."

The weekend will be unique in that there are multiple locations involved, with the 10/20 Collective hosting four

events, including two headliner shows. In total, there will be 11 different comedy events spread over seven venues, so audiences can pick and choose what they want to go to.

One location was a no-brainer. "The Black Monk Brewery is where I started doing our first showcases, and that's how I started building the brand of Off Constantly Comedy," Morelli explained, noting that the local brewery would be host to "Hot Jokes," a wing-centric event perfect for fans of the runaway series *Hot Ones*.

Then there are events like Inked Comedy at Andromeda Studios, an idea that finds comedians literally under the (tattoo) gun. The idea donned on Morelli while he was getting a tattoo from Leslie Fiolek Hess at the last 40 Under 40 Experience party — and will be one of the very first events of its kind. — Nick Warren

Events run from April 27 to 30 // Various Locations // Individual ticket pricing available // For more information, visit Flagship City Comedy Fest on Facebook and Instagram, and for tickets, go to tickets.eriereader.com

Thursday, April 27

Room 33 Showcase // 7:30 p.m.

Room 33 // 1033 State St. // Free

Casey Kuftic & Friends // 8 p.m.

Edinboro VFD Station 38 // 125 Meadville St. #2507,

Edinboro // \$20

Friday, April 28

Calamari's Showcase // 7:30 p.m.

Calamari's Squid Row // 1317 State St. // Free

Learnmore Jonasi // 9:30 p.m.

10/20 Collective // 1020 Holland St. // \$20 - 23

Saturday, April 29

Not Your Grandma's Brunch // 12 p.m.

10/20 Collective // \$10

Hot Jokes at Black Monk // 5:30 p.m.



A full weekend of hilarity is in store during the Flagship City Comedy Fest, happening at various venues across Erie. Featured national headliners include (left) Learnmore Jonasi, (top right) Brent Terhune, and (bottom right) Kristen Becker.

Black Monk Brewery // 3721 W. 12th St. // Free

Brent Terhune // 8:30 p.m.

Room 33 // \$25 - 28

Late Night Laughs // 11 p.m.

10/20 Collective // \$10

Sunday, April 30

Heavenly Brunch (clean set) // 12:30 p.m.

10/20 Collective // \$10

Inked Comedy // 3:30 p.m.

Andromeda Studios // 3735 W. Lake Rd. // \$10

Kristen Becker // 6:30 p.m.

Sheraton Erie Bayfront // 55 W. Bay Rd. / \$20 - 28

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EVENTS

The Historical Glamour of the Rumball Family

Night Flight event brings history to light at The Dollhouse

FRIDAY, APR. 28

Historically glamorous, Erie's Rumball family has a long legacy in the cosmetics industry. Amanda Rumball is working to bring light to her family's success story with her local makeup service: Muah Rumball.

Since Rumball was young, she had an ingrained love for beauty and makeup. When she decided to pursue her dream as a makeup artist here in Erie, her grandmother passed along a great collection of meticulous records, marketing campaigns, and original beauty products that were created by her ancestors. Rumball knew that she had to dig deeper into the foundation of her family's legacy. As she researched, she found drama, mystery, and great success.

Clare Rumball, Amanda's great aunt, was an entrepreneur in Erie and began operating her own clothing storefront in 1937. Madam Rumball, a fashionable and mysterious woman, was Clare's mother and was responsible for devising a line of cosmetics that Clare would expand upon through her business. Madam was

a trained cosmetologist who produced a wide variety of beauty products. Among her best selling products was hair dye, which she referred to as "watercolor."

As strong female entrepreneurs, the Rumballs stood as pioneers for women during a time when they were not expected to be anything more than housewives. Rumball said, "I wanted to put on an event to honor them because they were pretty amazing women in Erie who added to the rich history here."

On April 28, vintage boutique The Dollhouse at Pointe Four will be transformed into a museum to honor and feature the Rumball women. "Night Flight," named after one of Clare's signature perfumes, will be a lively evening filled with history, drinks, jazz, and style. Clare's original retail cosmetics, including her signature brass tube lipsticks, will be showcased.

As the story of the Rumball women is revealed throughout the night, sip on a unique Rumball cocktail created by the Luminary Distillery made from Clare's favorite liquor: bourbon. Fall deep into the 1940s with classic jazz music that

SARAH BECK



Local makeup artist Amanda Rumball is highlighting the historic legacy of her family, who were pioneering women entrepreneurs in Erie. The Night Flight event will transform the Dollhouse at Pointe Four into a museum to honor their contributions to cosmetic history.

harkens back to when Clare Rumball was at the peak of her business' success. Dressing in your finest vintage garb is encouraged, so take in a quick shopping spree at Pointe Four prior to the event, if possible. After all, the fabulous Madam Rumball would expect you to appear in style. — Sarah Beck

For more history on this story listen to the Food Wine and Good Ol' Times podcast "Women's History Month: The Story of Clare Rumball" available on all streaming platforms.

6 p.m. to 9 p.m. // The Dollhouse at Pointe Four, 423 State St. // Free admission and cash bar

A poster for the Dramashop One Act Festival. The background is split into yellow and green sections. The text is in white and blue. It features the Dramashop logo, the title "ONE ACT FESTIVAL", and lists featured playwrights: Matthew Crays, Howard Lang, Brenna Thummler, and Margo Wolfe. It also includes ticket information and the dates "APR 21 - 29, 2023".

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A poster for the Erie Art Museum Spring Show. The background is dark blue with a woman in a white dress standing against a starry sky. The text is in white and orange. It features the Erie Art Museum logo, the title "100th ANNUAL NICOLE & HARRY MARTIN SPRING SHOW", and the dates "ON VIEW THROUGH AUGUST 11th 2023". It also includes the website "ERIEARTMUSEUM.ORG/SPRING-SHOW".

Erie Art Museum

**100TH ANNUAL
NICOLE & HARRY MARTIN
SPRING
SHOW**

**ON VIEW
THROUGH
AUGUST 11TH
2023**

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EVENTS

The Erie Humane Society's Second Annual Mutt Gala

Fundraiser proves that every dog has its day

SATURDAY, APR. 29

Get your tuxes pressed and your ball gowns ready because the Erie Humane Society's (EHS) second annual Mutt Gala is coming to the Bayfront Convention Center. This dog-gone cute event is a spin on the iconic New York City Met Gala. Attendees are encouraged to wear formal "with flair" attire, while the event features a sit down dinner, drinks, dancing, and, of course, the canine fashion show. This event will certainly bring out your inner party animal.

Executive director Nicole Leone states, "The pets we feature at our show are many of the special needs pets that are receiving care before being placed permanently in their new homes. Additionally we will have adoptable pets that are not in need of specialty care, greeting guests and giving lots of snuggles throughout the evening."

The event helps raise much needed funding for the organization's outpa-

tient medical expenses. Leone explains: "As a no-kill shelter, this fundraiser affords us the opportunity to pursue care for pets in critical condition and that care is crucial to their survival. The EHS spends approximately \$85,000 annually on providing shelter pets life-saving medical care in order for them to live a healthy life in an amazing home. These surgeries include tumor removals, amputations, reconstructive surgeries due to abuse, heartworm treatment, etc."

This is an event for all animal lovers and while the EHS would love to include cats at the Mutt Gala, the stimulating environment would be too stressful for them. However, they will have images at the event featuring many of their special needs cats that the funds raised from the gala will also support. —Larry Wheaton

5:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. // Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier // \$95 // For tickets and info, visit: eriehumanesociety.org/events/mutt-gala



The Erie Humane Society is poised to launch their second annual Mutt Gala, which is a formal night of entertainment as well as a major fundraiser to help fund care for the special needs animals at the shelter. From left: singer Audra Miller, Humane Society executive director Nicole Leone, and business manager Emily McCullor.

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BOOK REVIEWS

A Flaw in the Design

Nathan Oates' latest will keep your gears turning

Gil's life has been idyllic for more than a decade: after making the move from New York City to the countryside of Vermont and becoming an English professor at a local college, he now lives a peaceful life with his wife and two daughters — until his nephew comes to stay. In Nathan Oates' *A Flaw in the Design*, fiction and fact blur together to create a suspenseful mystery where not everything is as it seems.

When Gil's estranged sister and brother-in-law die in a mysterious accident, Gil is surprised to find that they've left guardianship of their teenage son Matthew to him, the very culprit behind the falling out between Gil and his sister seven years prior.

Now seemingly changed, Matthew shows little of the sinister child he used to be, instead putting forth a persona of ease and charm, lulling those around him into a false sense of security. Gil, however, still harbors some guilt as well as anger toward the boy, not forgetting the day in which he put

his daughter's life in danger.

Although he hopes to put the past behind them, Gil starts to suspect ulterior motives when Matthew enrolls in one of his creative writing classes and begins turning in disturbing stories with details that are too close for comfort. When it seems that things may progress further, Gil feels he must take matters into his own hands in order to protect himself and his family, and expose the truth about his nephew.

While unreliable narrators are often used in the suspense genre, in this case it is up to the reader to determine how much or how little stock to put in each of the characters in Oates' novel. Employing third-person narration throughout, Oates carefully crafts a mind-bending thought puzzle, leading readers down a rabbit hole of paranoia surrounding Gil and Matthew.

Written in compulsive prose and with the makings of a one-session read, Nathan Oates' *A Flaw in the*



Design will keep gears turning and minds thinking up until the very end.
— Ally Kutz

Random House // 304 pages // Thriller, Mystery

None of This Would Have Happened If Prince Were Alive

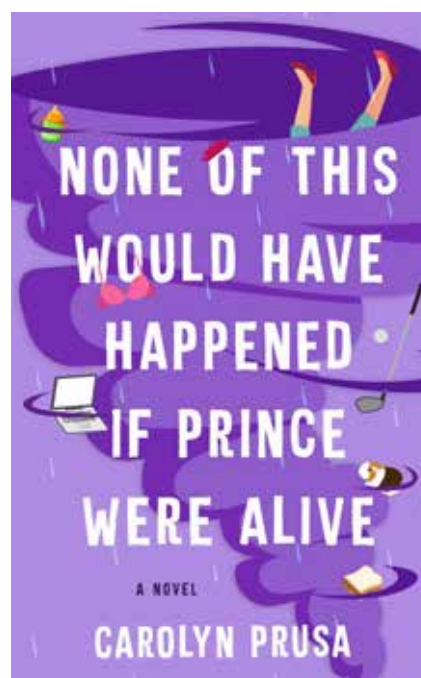
Carolyn Prusa's novel storms in with welcome dose of reality

Ramona's life seems to take the Rphrase "when it rains, it pours" to a new extreme — in this case, it comes in the form of a Category Four hurricane in the midst of all her other issues.

She has a boss with no concept of work-life balance, a toddler struggling through potty training, and an over-sharer for a mother — Ramona already has her plate full when she discovers her husband is cheating on her with one of the mothers from her son's elementary school. At this point, Hurricane Matthew seems to be the least of her troubles.

As the storm nears Savannah, Ramona makes the decision to evacuate with her two young children, but picks up two unlikely companions along the way: Bailey, a neighborhood teenager left home alone, and Clarence Thomas, the class guinea pig left in her son's charge for the weekend.

What follows is a difficult yet humorous attempt to evacuate town, with the constant looming of not only the storm on the horizon, but her minivan's check



engine light's constant glow. Avoiding apology texts and calls from her husband and his mistress while also worrying about her mother, Ramona remembers the days when her life was like a

Prince song, and longs for a time before he died, when none of this would've happened.

As a main character, Ramona isn't entirely likable — she doesn't fall into the

Carolyn Prusa deftly toes the line in creating a character (Ramona) that shows the realities of dealing with life as it hurtles at us, rather than painting the picture-perfect solutions usually found in fiction.

"perfect" mold that a lot of main characters might fall into, and at times can be frustrating; but it is in her flaws that her relatability shines through. Carolyn Prusa deftly toes the line in creating a character that shows the realities of dealing with life as it hurtles at us, rather than painting the picture-perfect solutions usually found in fiction, creating a leading lady we didn't know we needed until now. — Ally Kutz

Atria Books // 336 pages // Contemporary Fiction



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MOVIE REVIEWS

Eight Hours Don't Make a Day

Full Time is an Incredible (and Stressful) Experience



It was theorized that as technology advanced, the human race would require less time at work. That theory has been thoroughly debunked in the late-stage capitalist nightmare of the modern world, where a 40 hour work week isn't enough to get by and every hobby and interest is encouraged to be monetized in our "hustle culture." Almost on-cue, French filmmaker Éric Gravel gives us *Full Time*, one of the most anxiety-inducing films in recent memory. Gravel is able to pull an incredible amount of suspense from daily life where simply making it through the week feels like a Herculean task.

Full Time chronicles a week in the life of Julie Roy (Laure Calamy), a single mother of two who works as a housekeeper for a high-end Paris hotel. But, she has an interview scheduled for a marketing research job that could lead to a better life for her and her children. Now Julie must alternate between her job and her children and still make it to her interview. This is exacerbated by a mass labor strike that has ground all



HAUTECOURT

public transit to a halt.

Though a basic slice of life story, Gravel shoots it with the frenetic energy of a suspense thriller. The tight, documentary-style cinematography combined with the rapid-fire editing and thumping synth soundtrack make this feel like an intimate, socially conscious film from the Dardenne

Brothers colliding with *Run Lola Run*. Gravel is clearly aiming for a bigger social statement, but he brilliantly condenses that statement into a very personal story. Anyone who's ever spent a significant amount of time with too much on their schedule will find *Full Time* unbearably relatable. — Forest Taylor

Full Time is available on Apple TV+, Amazon Prime, Google Play, Vudu, and YouTube. Written and directed by Éric Gravel // Starring Laure Calamy, Anne Suarez, Genevieve Mnich, Nolan Arizmendi, Sasha Lemaitre Cremaschi, Cyril Gueï, Cyril Masson, Lucie Gallo, Agathe Dronne, Mathilde Weil, Dana Fiaque, Marème N'Diaye, and Olivier Faliez // 88 minutes // Unrated ('R' equivalent)

Fear of the Unknown

The Outwaters is a Scary Premise That Goes Off the Rails



One of the unsung pleasures of the horror genre is its ability to turn familiar places into unfamiliar scenes of dread and terror. This year's *Skinamarink* did that all too effectively with a typical suburban home and now *The Outwaters* attempts the same with the very ground we all walk on. It's an ambitious undertaking but director Robbie Banfitch goes a little too deeply into experimentation. The result, despite some creepy imagery and brilliant sound design, is more alienating than terrifying.

Taken from three recovered memory cards after four young people disappeared in the Mojave Desert while shooting a music video five years earlier, the footage reveals a simple camping trip that uncovers a strange phenomenon. As night falls, the four travelers undergo a series of events where nature, the earth, and even reality itself begin to turn against them.

Banfitch is clearly going for an incomprehensible, Lovecraftian kind of horror and it is an admirable effort for such a small budget. However, the constant



CINEDIGM

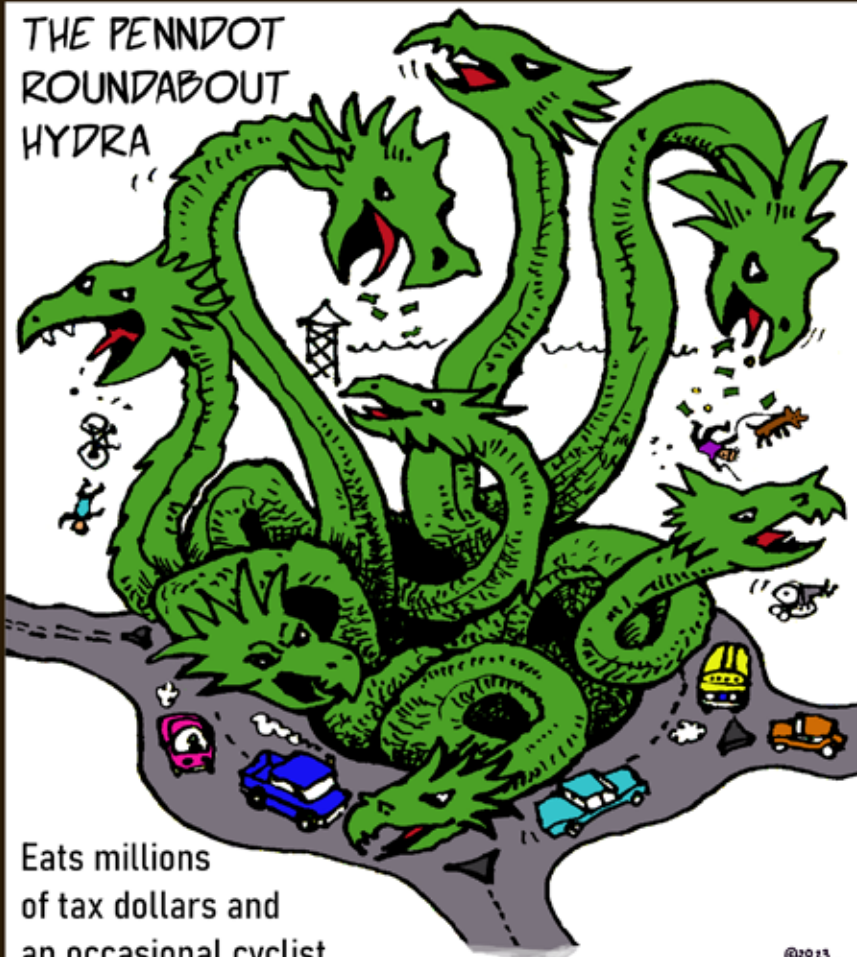
shaky camera and intentionally poor lighting indicative of found footage films leaves the horror frustratingly obtuse. Plus, one of the cameras used has several dead pixels that makes the first act very distracting. It is said that what we don't see is scarier than what we do, but there still needs to be some-

thing — anything — for the audience to understand. Otherwise the horror becomes a series of random images that soon get repetitive. I feel bad picking on such a small film for being ambitious but in this case, the ambitions may have overwhelmed everything else. — Forest Taylor

The Outwaters is available on Amazon Prime, AppleTV+, Google Play, YouTube, and Vudu // Written and directed by Robbie Banfitch // Starring Banfitch, Angela Basolis, Michelle May, Scott Schamell, and Leslie Ann Banfitch // 110 minutes // Unrated ('R' equivalent)

JUST TOYIN' WITCHA — BY B. TOY

THE PENNDOT
ROUNDAABOUT
HYDRA



Eats millions
of tax dollars and
an occasional cyclist

©2023
B. Toy

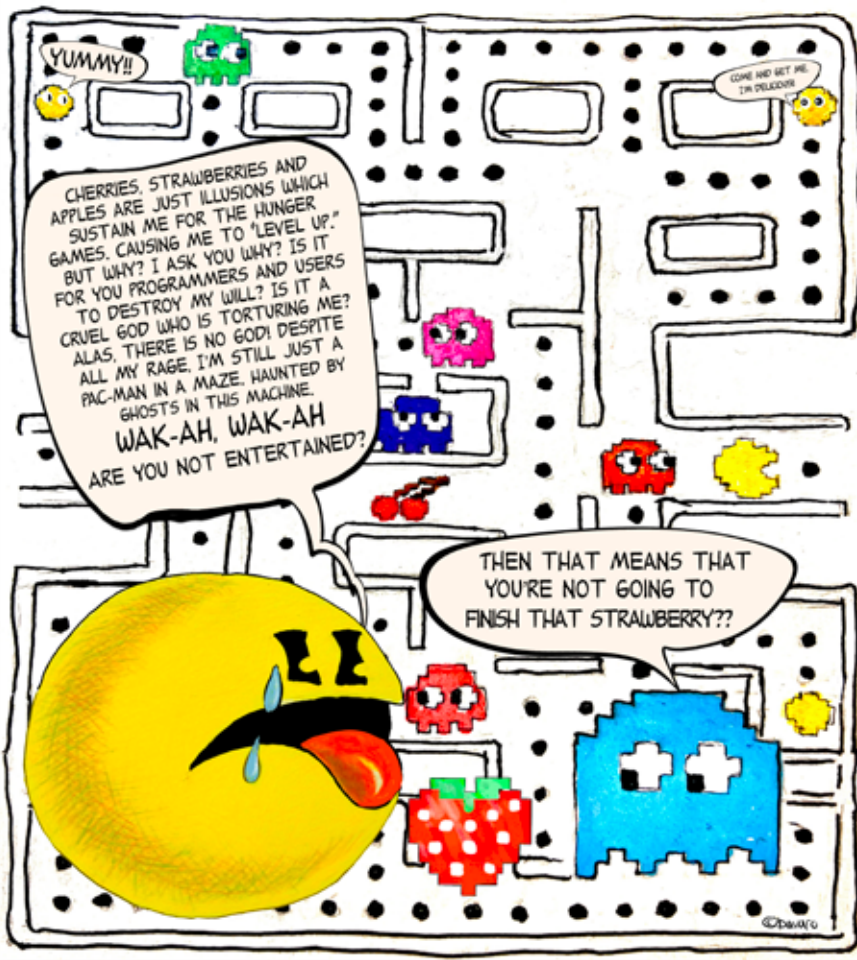
THE TAO OF LITTLE FEAT

ONE OF MY MOST FAVORITE BANDS IN HIGH SCHOOL WAS LITTLE FEAT WITH LOWELL GEORGE. HE WAS SO GREAT I EVEN NAMED MY '76 VW BUG AFTER HIM. I WOULD EVENTUALLY MARRY A DARK HAired, DARK EYED, BEARDED MAN WHO LIKES TO WEAR OVERALLS AND PLAYS GUITAR. COINCIDENCE? MAGICALLY, I EVEN WON FREE TICKETS ON THE RADIO TO SEE THEM LIVE. I'VE LEARNED A FEW THINGS FROM THEM:

- BE WILLIN' TO BE MOVIN'
- BOOGIE YOUR SNEAKERS AWAY
- LOVE YOUR LOVE THE MOST
- LET YOUR MEMORY DRIFT & DO NOTHING AT ALL
- KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE ROAD THAT'S AHEAD OF YOU
- COME ON & BE A REAL FRIEND



Fish that Talk by JOHN EDWARDS ALAS POOR PAC-MAN



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HE GRU OUT OF IT

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ALBUM REVIEWS

Bill Callahan

YTILAER

Drag City



Years ago, when recording tapes in his bedroom, Smog (Bill Callahan) positioned himself amongst marginally appreciated outsider artists like Jandek. Decades later, we find him shoulder to shoulder with influential songwriters like Fred Neil and Leonard Cohen. His unfolding musicianship, seemingly simple in technique, shines brighter with each release. On *YTILAER* he embraces it, surrounding himself with talents like Jim White (Dirty Three) and Emmett Kelly (The Cairo Gang, Ty Segall). Callahan's baritone delivery is like slowly pouring sweet, thick syrup — so rich and filling. His songwriting has always been misanthropic, sardonic, acerbic, and deep. Yet these offerings shine light into his dark shadows. He is still Southern Gothic in soul, finding mystery in the mundane, and melancholy in the lighthearted as in "The Captain." However, "Natural Information" provides a joyful mix between a School House Rock and Richie Havens tune. He carries us through our waking moments when we question which is more real — our dreams or our daily life — and in "First Bird" embraces both. "Coyotes" reminds one of the brilliant marriage between pop music and unsettling folklore found in tunes like Michael Murphy's "Wildfire." This is an important recording which will be sought after down the road. Buy it now. — Melissa Sullivan Shimek



Fall Out Boy

So Much (for) Stardust

Fueled By Ramen



For years, Fall Out Boy's discography could be categorized as "pre-hiatus" and "post-hiatus." With *So Much (for) Stardust*, the band splits the stylistic differences between those two eras, serving up classic emo/pop-punk anthems and polished pop-rock in equal measure. Members Patrick Stump and Pete Wentz may be adamant that *So Much (for) Stardust* isn't a "throwback" record, but it's hard to ignore just how much these songs will please day-one fans. Take lead single and opening track, "Love From the Other Side," aside from the return of prominent, distorted guitars and Neal Avron's production, the song sounds almost like a lost cut from their 2007 album *Infinity on High*. The same could be said for highlight and album centerpiece "I Am My Own Muse," a cartoonishly dark orchestral piece that calls back to emo anthems like "Thanks Fr th Mmrs," "I Write Sins Not Tragedies," and "The Bird and The Worm." But the album also showcases the band's penchant for huge hooks and stunning vocal melodies, evidenced by doo-wop number "So Good Right Now" and the theatrical "Flu Game." Fall Out Boy has grown a lot in the past 22 years, but on *So Much (for) Stardust*, the band you loved then and the band that worked so hard to get here converge into something brighter than they've ever been before. — Aaron Mook



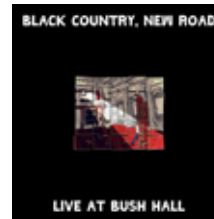
Black Country, New Road

Live at Bush Hall

Ninja Tune



Look at what we did together/BCNR, friends forever! There's a lot of lore attached to Black Country, New Road — like their lead singer leaving abruptly before the release of their last album, or the fact that their de facto new album, *Live from Bush Hall*, accompanies a concert film featuring performances stylized as school plays. But if one ignores all that and boils down the band's attitude into a single lyric, it would be that one. That life-affirming chorus feels directed towards former frontman Isaac Wood and the band's fans, a reminder that no matter what you're going through, it will never overshadow the goodwill you've built. It's a bold move to release a live performance as a new album, but occasional banter aside, it's hardly noticeable; *Live at Bush Hall* feels like a natural extension of *Ants From Up There*, and that should relieve fans that were concerned about Wood's departure. With the exception of the stunning "Turbines/Pigs," the songs here are shorter while still capturing the dramatic energy of mid-aughts indie-rock albums (Arcade Fire's *Funeral*, Sufjan's *Illinois*, etc). By rotating three vocalists, BCNR presents a collection that is cohesive while varied; while some of the songs may lack the memorability of *AFUT*, it all comes together with a reprise of "Up Song," the opening track that most fans will greet with a smile and a sigh of relief. — Aaron Mook



100 Gecs

10,000 Gecs

Dog Show/Atlantic



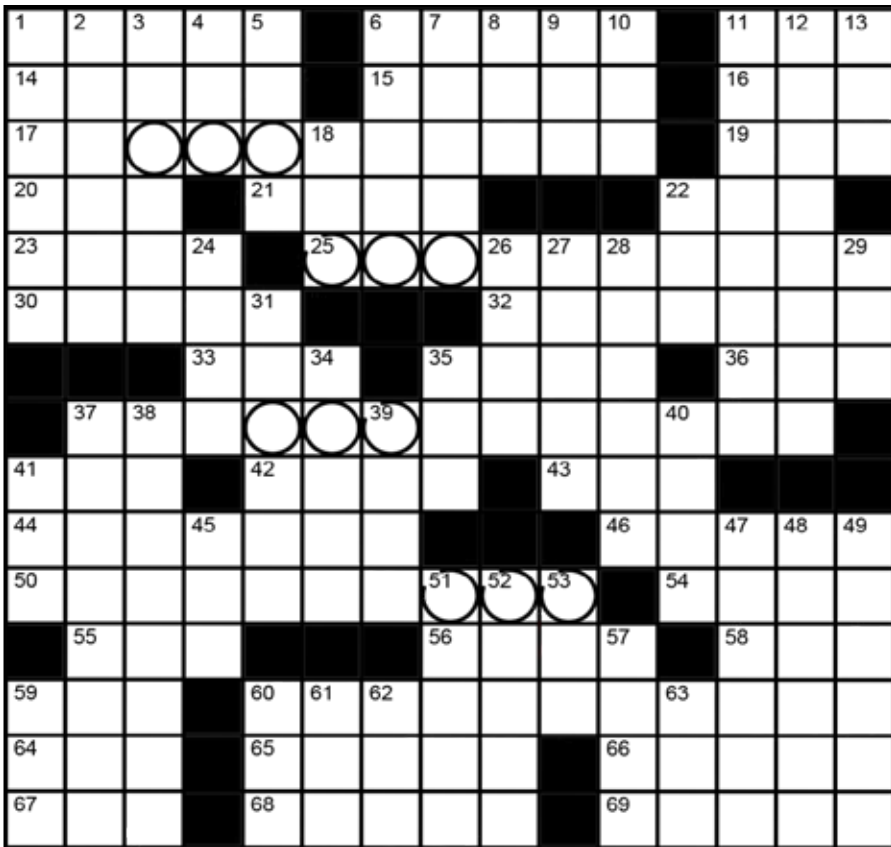
It will surprise no fan of 100 Gecs to know that the duo's latest full-length is exceedingly fun. A monolithic testament to ADHD songwriting, Dylan Brady and Laura Les are experiencing an "it" moment in the indie zeitgeist, and for good reason. Bursting onto the scene in 2019 with their debut album *1000 Gecs*, their music was an explosion of sound, a hyperpop bombast blending elements of pop, punk, electronic, and hip-hop, all with a healthy sense of humor. What sets 100 Gecs apart (often a polarizing figure to some uninformed listeners) is their willingness to take risks and poke at boundaries. Their music is unabashedly goofy, with infectious hooks and earworms that stick with you long after the music has stopped. Their increased use of ska upbeats comes off as both ironic and earnest at the same time. Ska tracks like "Frog on the Floor" (trading an upstroke guitar for ribbit samples) and "I Got My Tooth Removed" serve as joyous anthems, with Les laughing during vocal takes. The more "traditional" hyperpop tracks — if that's even a thing — like "Dumbest Girl Alive," "Hollywood Baby," and the captivating early single "mememe" anchor the album while still bursting with youthful exuberance and pop experimentation, pushing the limits of modern music with a smile. — Nick Warren



TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



CROSSWORD



Across

1. Small songbird
6. TV blocking device
11. HQ of the LDS church
14. Olympia ____, three-term U.S. senator from Maine
15. Come to light
16. "You're squeezing my udder's teats too hard!"
17. Nonvegetarian egg dish you might see on a 60-Across restaurant menu?
19. URL ending for a charity
20. Snake in ancient Egyptian art
21. Nudge
22. Author with a tombstone that reads "Quoth the raven, nevermore"
23. Cry
25. Fruity dessert you might see on a 60-Across restaurant menu?
30. Nickname used by Shaggy
32. Pound and others
33. Chest muscle, for short
35. Italian automaker
36. Suffix with different or confident
37. MSG, coloring and other nutritional info you might see on a 60-Across restaurant menu?
41. "I pity the fool" speaker
42. Shades
43. Yoko whose Twitter account features a peace

Down

1. Scornful dismissals
2. "Be right there!"
3. "Grey's Anatomy" star Ellen
4. ____, Jima
5. Substitute teacher, e.g.
6. Bravery in battle
7. Latin for "I believe"
8. Thwack
9. Suffix with real or surreal
10. "____-wee's Big Adventure"
11. Blended beverage

12. Lynn and Lynch
13. Machine part
18. Tarzan creator's monogram
22. Strong throw, in baseball slang
24. Law enforcement, slangily
26. Depression follower, for short
27. "Super cool"
28. Sharp, like a cold wind
29. French fashion monogram
31. Sleep around
34. Trans rights or climate change
35. Their workers go to blazes, for short
37. "Sorry, no can do"
38. Frozen treat brand with Sir Isaac Lime and Little Orphan Orange flavors
39. Thought-provoking
40. Field mouse
41. The Golden Arches, on stock tickers
45. Figs. on a scoreboard
47. Natural
48. Eve who wrote "The Vagina Monologues"
49. Singer who won 36 Tejano Music Awards
51. Breezes (through)
52. "Color me impressed!"
53. Teriyaki sauce base
57. Alternative to FedEx
59. Soldiers at USO shows
60. Opponent
61. Part of ETA: Abbr.
62. [I'm a goat!]
63. Uni- + bi-



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