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#### **From the Editors**

#### It's just so typically meme

Sometimes a meme can be a good thing. I mean, don't get me wrong, a lot of the time they're inaccurate, enraging, distasteful. But sometimes, can't they just hit it square on the nose? Someone in internetland sums up a thought or feeling or political point of view so succinctly, it's like poetry.

I recently screenshotted a meme that had that quality. To credit the artist, Whitney Alese stated:

"Instead of lamenting about what we cannot do, focus on what we can: donate to/volunteer at your local food pantry or feeding organization, donate to mutual aid, learn about upcoming elections, especially local, support independent journalism, support small businesses, and support your library."

Whitney, you hit it square on the nose. This meme felt particularly relevant as I was compiling the content for our May Issue, the very one you hold in your hand right now – our summer event preview issue. For most of Erie, the turn from winter to summer is the most welcome change. The increases in sunlight and opportunities for fresh air, more outdoor activities and interaction with nature, and large-scale public social events help to throw aside lament and bolster the vibe and overall positive energy.

Instead of lamenting, we're hitting on a lot of the points that Whitney made in her brilliant meme. Within our gargantuan Summer Events Preview feature – which lists (nearly) all of the major (and some minor) events happening throughout Erie this summer – I've also listed all of the regular farmers markets, and was thrilled to see an increase in the occurrence and affordability of the Pay-What-You-Can farm stands. Happening nearly every day of the week during the harvest season and relying on donations, volunteerism, and community support, this defines the actions of both supporting feeding organizations and donating to mutual aid.

You guys. YOU NEED TO VOTE. Especially for local elections. We have an opportunity to swap out our current dumpster-fire of a county executive and replace him with someone who is professional, level-headed, and who knows how to deal with multi-million dollar budgets. Won't that change be nice? After this election, we could have a new mayor (or not). We have judges and magistrates on the ballot, and if we've learned nothing from the past few months, it should be that judges are VERY important. Please go vote in the primary on May 20. If you need any more information on the candidates, see Ben Speggen's rundown within.

Supporting small businesses is a bell we ring in every single issue. Supporting individual artists is so important as well, like Tommy Link, JC Nickles, and Erika Kuhn, all featured within. And with funding on the line for local libraries and museums, donating, supporting, and patronizing these places is more important than ever.

And Whitney, thank you so much for including support for independent journalism on your list. Regardless of my accolades herein, it would be nice to live in a country where memes aren't people's main source of information. Supporting a press that is free, local, and focused on facts helps keep out the noise and see through the spin. Your support of our small, independent paper means so much and it truly makes a community difference. So let's work to stave off the lament, let's turn towards summer, and focus on these things we, together, *can* do.



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#### IRG's Plastics Plan: Promising in Theory, Precarious in Practice

Funding, environmental questions lead to anticipated recycling facility being scrapped

#### By: Jeff Bloodworth

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The most obvious fact is that humans are drowning in plastic. In 1950, manufacturers made two million tons of it. Seventy-five years later, that figure has spiraled to a gobsmacking 450 million tons produced annually. Every year, the average American sends 290 pounds of plastic waste to the landfill, or worse – the roadside. A synthetic product, plastic, unlike paper, requires hundreds of years to degrade. In the interim, toxic chemicals from micro-plastics seep into water, food, and even the air we breathe. In 2020, Mitch Hecht, IRG's chairman and founder, offered hope and a solution. His \$300 million "mega-sized, all-plastics SuperPRF (Plastics Recovery Facility)" offered a "sustainable" panacea to our plastic dilemma - along with 300 "family supporting" jobs.

When it came to IRG, Judith Enck did not see a solution, she saw unanswered questions. The former Environmental Protection Agency administrator and founder of Beyond Plastics told me, "When you hear recycling it sounds like a good thing. But if you spend 1 hour doing your own research, you learn that it [plastic recycling] is more complicated." Unlike aluminum or glass, which are almost endlessly reusable, only plastic types #1 and #2 are, in practice, recycled. Comprising less than 20 percent of all plastics, these can be recycled a handful of times. But this does little about the other 80 percent, plastic types #3-#7. Beyond that quandary, Enck wondered, "Most local governments already have contracts to recycle this plastic. So, where were the #1 and #2 plastics going to come from?"

Recycling plastic offers a hopeful answer to a complicated problem. Optimism nudges us toward the hope that recycling solves the plastic dilemma. Strong, durable, and cheap, plastic is indispensable in products ranging from F-16 fighter jets to iPhones. But the plastics industry reaps huge profits from redundant single-use cups, bags, and the ever-ubiquitous straw. Rather than pivot to glass and paper, IRG offered the idea of unrestrained plastic consumption as sustainably "green." In 2024, the lure of this convinced the Biden administration to conditionally award IRG with a \$182 million loan. One Department of Energy official even pleaded to Enck, "You are an environmentalist, why aren't you supporting this?"

Fueling the hope was IRG's location. Hecht bought



Organizing members of Our Water, Our Air, Our Rights (from left to right) Art Leopold, Russ Taylor, and Juan Llarena spoke with Jeff Bloodworth about their opposition to the IRG plant from the beginning – their doubts centered around environmental sustainability as well as a confusing business plan.

land for his plant on the lower east side where the Hammermill Paper Company once stood. A designated Opportunity and Environmental Justice Zone, the site came with significant tax breaks. The promise of a \$300 million investment and 300 jobs was powerful. County and city, Republican and Democrat, Erie's political establishment swooned. In 2020, Mayor Joe Schember spoke for every elected official, "My team and I are tremendously happy about the International Recycling Group's plan to create the first ever, all-plastics sorting facility right here in Erie."

Russ Taylor understands the political calculus. One of the leaders of Erie's opposition to IRG, Taylor admitted, "Local politicians are always for jobs. Some of the trades unions were also for IRG. \$300 million in construction jobs is a lot. It is tough to oppose." Taylor, along with friends Art Leopold and Juan Llarena belong to Our Water, Our Air, Our Rights. The trio told me, "We weren't totally against it. We had questions, if you [Mitch Hecht] had answers. We want good jobs for Erie residents, but we want details. How many permanent jobs in an automated plant? What types of jobs? We never got answers."

Four thousand miles away in Heidelberg, Germany, Mark Osiecki was thinking the exact same thoughts. The Erie native turned engineer may have managed environmental projects across five continents – but he always kept tabs on home. To Osiecki, Erie's lower east side is more than a place, it is family. Osiecki's dad worked at Hammermill for 42 years. The Osiecki clan lived down the street from the plant. Most every important event in Osiecki's early life, from baptisms to first bike rides, occurred in Hammermill's shadow. The site, as he told me, "Is home as home can be, this neighborhood. It is the family stomping ground."

Emotionally attached, Osiecki had also managed projects like IRG. He appreciated the lure of IRG for a "lower east side [that] has been hammered" but also understood plastics recycling. Osiecki told me that from the start, "My antennae and eyebrows went up. It just seemed, Mr. Hecht was so adamant about the environmental angle and so invested in being an environmentalist, it raised my



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1 n l

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#### **NEWS & OPINION**

suspicions."

Using publicly available information, Osiecki reversed engineered IRG's business plan. Unlike Enck, he thinks IRG could have been marginally profitable. But he also came to realize, "He [Hecht] was wildly undercapitalized. I looked at his product, it might work if he had the capital. But how can he repay these loans? It is a huge financial burden to make a profit, pay back the loan, and pay employees. He promised 300 jobs – this would capsize his business model."

To Osiecki, IRG was no sham, as some critics suggest, but it was sold to Erie on shaky promises. Instead of 300 jobs, Osiecki thinks IRG could employ 60-70 full-timers. As for the "life-cycle analysis" Hecht, and his supporters at Penn State-Behrend, cited to prove IRG's sustainability - it was not peer-reviewed by outside experts in the field, raising questions about its credibility. Then there was IRG's wastewater plan. Recyclers shred waste plastic and then wash away toxic chemicals to create pelletized, recycled plastics. This process creates immense amounts of micro-plastic pollution and contaminated wastewater. Osiecki understood this. He had recently engineered a filtration system in a Stockholm seaport that kept toxins from pouring into the Baltic Sea. But at IRG, he told me, "All of this was going into a retaining pond and then flushed straight into Lake Erie. No treatment. No filtration."

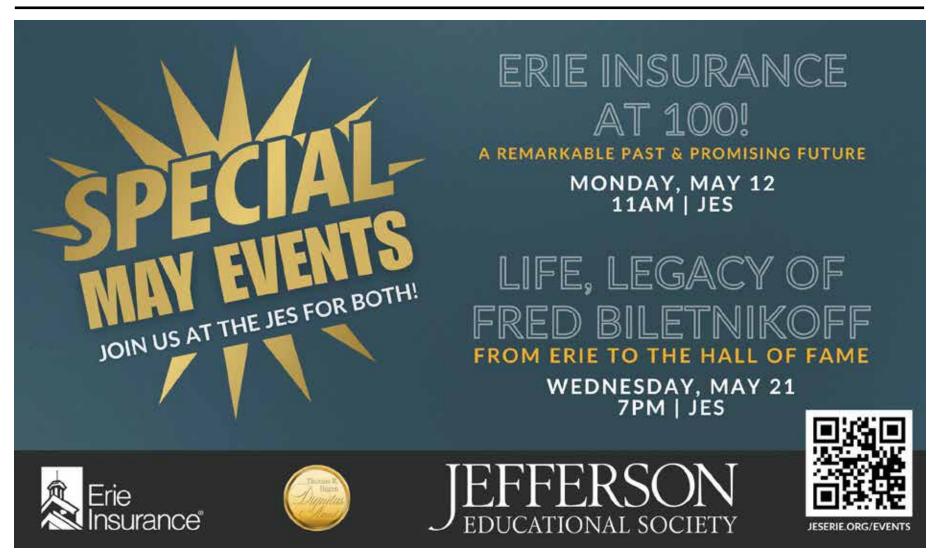
To Osiecki, IRG's "Clean Red" was just as problematic as the wastewater. IRG planned to recycle plastic types #1 and #2. But it also proposed turning

Recycling plastic offers a hopeful answer to a complicated problem. Optimism nudges us toward the hope that recycling solves the plastic dilemma. Strong, durable, and cheap, plastic is indispensable in products ranging from F-16 fighter jets to iPhones. But the plastics industry reaps huge profits from redundant single-use cups, bags, and the ever-ubiquitous straw. Rather than pivot to glass and paper, IRG offered the idea of unrestrained plastic consumption as sustainably "green."

types #3-#7 into "Clean Red," which when mixed with coal would fuel a Gary, Indiana steel mill. The science on burning plastic is clear, the procedure releases the most toxic human-made substance, dioxins, into the atmosphere, among other hazardous air pollutants. IRG officials claimed the 3,000-degree steel furnace would vaporize dioxins. Osiecki admits that "vaporization" is "theoretically true." But he also explained, "In a lab, blast furnace heat can deconstruct and keep carcinogenic dioxins deconstructed. But steel mills lose control of emissions all the time. There is no intervention if you find bad emissions." In theory, Clean Red offers the hope that plastic waste can fuel steel production without dioxins. But Osiecki thinks reality has shown that this would not be the case.

Erie native and environmental activist John Vanco watched the IRG drama from afar. He told me, "My attitude was if they want to squander private money – that's their thing. But once they got a federal loan guarantee, I said no." When officials announced in March that the federal loan had collapsed, Vanco was scarcely surprised by IRG's demise. He sees it as just one more boondoggle in a long line of sketchy development schemes. From the Koehler Brewery Project to the tires-to-energy plant, Vanco sees "a litany of these projects" where outsiders use hope to make big promises and walk away.

Jeff Bloodworth is a professor of American political history at Gannon University. You can follow him on Twitter/X @jhueybloodworth or reach him at bloodwor003@ gannon.edu



#### **Pennsylvania Primary Elections 2025**

How voters cast ballots in May sets the stage for November's general election

By: Ben Speggen

**N** <sup>o</sup> matter the outcome, much bluster and bloviating follow presidential elections, as pundits and politicos prognosticate and pontificate about how the outcome of the past election – and the governing in the subsequent months – influence the upcoming midterms. Will the political pendulum sway gently, swing wildly, or remain stationary?

But lurking in between the presidential election years and the midterms are municipal elections. Odd years, literally – 2025, 2023, etc. – some people dismiss them as "off years." Voter turnout may make a case for that.

In the 2024 general election, which saw former U.S. President Donald Trump defeat incumbent U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, nearly 74 percent of registered voters in Erie County cast a ballot. In 2020, when former Vice President Joe Biden defeated then-incumbent President Trump, 68 percent of registered voters voted. The record high in Erie County came in 1992 at 87 percent when President Bill Clinton won his first of two terms.

But these are general election turnout numbers. And the 2025 general election remains 6 months away.

In Pennsylvania, one of 10 states with closed primaries in which registered voters can only vote along party lines, primary election numbers tend to be lower, even when a marquee race, like president, sits atop the ballot. Typically, by the time Pennsylvanians head to the ballots for their primaries, the marquee candidates have been decided.

In 2024, Erie County saw 25 percent voter turnout, with the candidates assumed to have been settled, setting up round two of Biden v. Trump. That, of course, changed when President Biden announced on July 21, 2024, that he would not seek the Democratic Party's nomination, and Vice President Harris earned his endorsement and later the party's, officially becoming the candidate on Aug. 5.

We'll know 2025 voter turnout on May 20 for the primary election and Nov. 4 for the general election.

But, for reference, in 2023, primary election turnout was just shy of 24 percent.

On ballots in Erie County, there are two statewide races: Judge of the Superior Court and Judge of the Commonwealth Court.

There are four countywide races: Judge of the Court of Common Pleas 6th Judicial District, County Executive, County Clerk of Records, and County Sheriff.

Three of Erie County's seven County Council seats are on the ballot – those in Districts 2, 4, and 6.



May 20 is the 2025 Pennsylvania primary election which is historically under-attended. Local politics have a large impact on the way we live in Erie and your voice matters. Consider some of the candidates pictured (clockwise from top left: Perry Wood, Jim Wertz, Jasmine Flores, Andre Horton, Joe Schember, Daria Devlin, Jeremy Lightner, and Emily Mosco Merski) as you plan out your vote for important races like Erie County Executive and Mayor.

The two largest cities in the county – Erie and Corry – feature mayoral races with incumbents defending their records and posts, and various other council races, contests for supervisors, auditors, etc. populate the 26-page-long 2025 Municipal Primary Candidate List available on the county government website.

All elections, of course, matter, and why fewer voters turn out at certain times remains the kind of debate politicos and pundits, whether reporting or opining at the national or local levels, make a living doing.

A case as to why more voters should turn out when more local-level elections are on the ballot: according to the Pew Research Center, Americans' views of local government remain far more positive than that of the state and federal levels.

A recent Pew study found 61 percent of adults rate their local government as positive, while 50 percent have a favorable rating of their state governments (a 4-point decline since 2022), and just 22 percent think positively about the federal government (down 10 percent since 2022).

Still, locally, that 61 percent is down from 66 percent in 2022, which was down from 69 percent in 2019 – suggesting trust is eroding at all levels, despite overall trust remaining higher locally.

Before turning to key races and candidates, and key dates and details a disclaimer. What this is: A brief overview of a select handful of races and the candidates hoping to emerge victorious in May and push onward towards November. What it is not: A comprehensive look at all races, or any one race. Given Pennsylvania's closed primaries, the following does not include Independent or other third party candidates, who, when running unopposed, will advance through the primaries and be included on the general election ballot.

#### Key Races and Candidates

#### **Erie County Court of Common Pleas**

With the retirement of Judge Elizabeth K. Kelly, voters will elect the newest member to the local bench of nine for the Erie County Court of Common Pleas – starting with the primaries. One is a registered Republican and two are registered Democrats.

Leigh Ann Orton, the Republican from North East, sought the office in 2023. Orton currently serves as the first assistant solicitor for Erie County.

The two newcomers seeking office – Jeremy Lightner and Emily Mosco Merski – are both Democrats who live in the city of Erie. Lightner is one of two chief deputy district attorneys for the county, and Merski is a private-practice lawyer, who also serves as a part-time public defender for the county.

There's a chance two candidates emerge from the primaries – one Republican and one Democrat, or both Democrats. In the race for the 10-year seat, candidates can cross-file so each appears on both ballots.

It is worth noting that another Erie County Court of Common Pleas seat isn't far off on the horizon. Judge Daniel Brabender retires in 2026, and his seat will be up for grabs in 2027.

#### **Erie County Executive**

What many will consider one of the marquee races in this cycle, the Erie County Executive seat is on the ballot.

#### **NEWS & OPINION**

First-term incumbent Republican Brenton Davis is seeking a four-year term. He is running unopposed.

Vying to return the seat to the Democrats are two candidates: Perry Wood and Christina Vogel. Wood is the long-time executive director of the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority, and Vogel is a franchise owner of Donatos Pizza.

#### **Erie County Council**

In this odd year, the even seats are up for election. Councilman Andre Horton is serving his third and final 4-year term in the 2nd District, and cannot seek reelection due to term limits. Three candidates have tossed their hats into the race – two Dems and one Republican.

If Jim Wertz' name sounds familiar, it is because he won the 2024 primary to challenge incumbent State Senator Dan Laughlin for the 49th District in a race that drew statewide attention, with Laughlin retaining his seat in November's general election. Wertz also served as the former Erie County Democratic Party chairman, and was a contributing editor to the Erie Reader, a post he resigned upon announcing his state senate bid. Also on the ballot for the Democrats is James DePalma.

On the Republican side, Renee Vendetti, who is among the several Republicans featured on the ErieStrongerTogether website, is seeking the seat.

In the 4th District, the number four is worth remembering. That is how many challengers are on the Democratic ticket, looking to oust incumbent Jim Winarski. They include Michael Keys, Kevin Pastewka, Carl Anderson, and Marcus Jacobs. No Republican candidates are on the primary ballot.

It is the opposite in the sixth district with no Democrats on the ballot. Two Republicans are vying for the seat – incumbent Charlie Bayle, who is seeking a second term, faces off against Scott Rastetter, who held the seat before Bayle's first-term victory.

#### **Erie City Council**

In the Erie City Council race, four seats are up for grabs, and at least two new faces will fill the new roster in City Hall come 2026.

Two current council members, Chuck Nelson, who is seeking to head into November's general election as the Democratic nominee for City Controller, and Mel Witherspoon, council's current president who returned via appointment in January 2024 to fill the vacant seat created by the resignation of former Councilmember Liz Allen, are not seeking another four-year term.

On the Democratic side, six candidates will be reduced to four heading into the general election. Jasmine Flores and Maurice Troop, both Democrats, are seeking a second four-year term. Current 2nd District County Council Member Andre Horton, who cannot seek reelection in that post due to term limits, is seeking a seat on the city council panel. Also in the race are Deonte Cooley, Marilyn Pol, and Darrel Vandeveld.

On the Republican side, four candidates are on the ballot: Anita Fay; Yevet Anderson; Kimberly Hunter; and Tina Hiotis. With closed primaries, all four should emerge victorious in the primary election. But it is an uphill battle in the fall with a more than two-to-one Democratic voter registration edge. The last Republican to serve on city council, John Evans, did so through appointment in 2012 through 2013.

#### **City of Erie Mayor**

In what many will consider another of the premier races in this cycle, the Mayor of the City of Erie is on the ballot.

Incumbent Joe Schember, a Democrat, is seeking his third – and would-be final because of term limits – 4-year term. He faces two challengers: Daria Devlin, current Erie School Board member and director of social impact for the Hamot Health Foundation; and, Sheila Woeger, a retired substitute teacher.

On the Republican side, Matthew Thomas, an

Erie-based attorney, is seeking the post. Like the Republican candidates for Erie's City Council, Thomas, too, faces an uphill battle. Unlike the council, which saw a Republican in Denise Robison Mullen elected in 1990, a Republican has not held the mayor post since 1961 when Charles Williamson was the last Republican elected mayor.

Recent history favors incumbents, as City of Erie voters tend to find a candidate-turned-politician and remain loyal (think: Sinnott, Savocchio, Tullio...). But city members of the Democratic Party recently endorsed Devlin.

Will the future look like Erie's history, will the party's endorsement of a challenger over the incumbent sway voters, or will Woeger pull off an upset surprise?

Voters will decide that – and set the stage for numerous other local and state-level races – on May 20.

#### **Key Dates and Details**

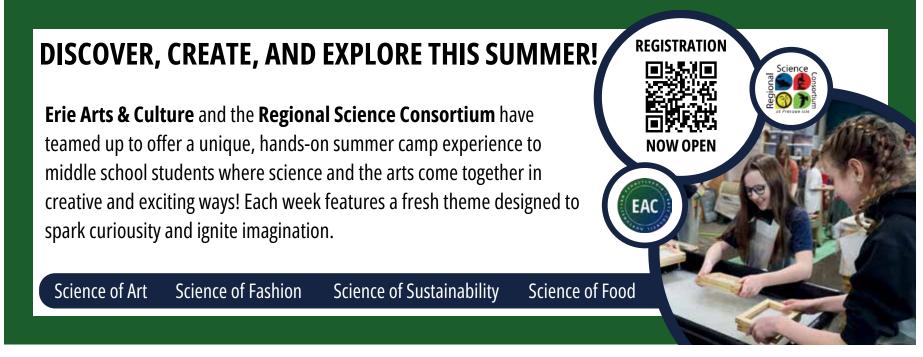
With May 20's election day approaching, there are several key dates and details to keep in mind.

The deadline to register to vote in the primary election was May 5 – meaning if you aren't registered by the time you're reading this, it is, unfortunately, too late for the primaries. You can still register for the general elections, and can do so at the Erie County Courthouse (140 W. Sixth St., Erie, PA 16501), or on the Erie County elections website.

May 13 is the last day to apply for a mail-in or absentee ballot. These ballots must be received by 8 p.m. on May 20, using either the secure drop box in front of the Erie County Courthouse or return it by mail using the enclosed return envelope.

Voters can, of course, cast their ballots on election day in-person at their polling places between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m.

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



#### Class Act(s): School Reunions Keep Us Connected in a Wired World

Why our alma maters can mean a lot

**By: Liz Allen** 

ou might call me a school reunion fangirl. Two years ago, I took a 10-hour Amtrak ride (including a layover in Chicago) to Milwaukee, Wisconsin for my 50-year college reunion at Marquette University.

Last summer, I hauled a towering "VMA" banner back to the Sisters of St. Joseph advancement office following our 55-year reunion for Villa Maria Academy at the Zem Zem Shrine Club.

Soon, I'll be working with friends on a 60-year reunion for St. Andrew's Grade School. At our age, we are mourning the loss of too many classmates, including Kathy McCallion DiNicola, longtime assistant principal at Villa, and Virginia Smith, owner of Chuck and Ginny's Restaurant with her late sister, Mary Ellen. Reunions are a good opportunity to honor their memories.

Of course, I don't blame those who shy away from reunions.

A friend from St. Andrew's once asked me why he would want to get together with the same people who bullied him for being an overweight kid. Other friends hold painful memories of the times when teachers scorned their intellect. And jock-cheerleader cliques still exist, according to two women I recently overheard talking about why they won't attend their 50-year high school reunions for East High (now East Middle School) or Tech Memorial (now Erie High).

Younger people also may not feel the need to schedule reunions at 5-year intervals. Emily Wargo, a member of the Young Erie Professionals, attended an all-school reunion for Iroquois High School last year with her parents. She was one of three members of the Class of 2018 at the reunion, and her folks "had more fun than me," she joked. Younger people keep up with news from friends on social media, she pointed out.

Still, I treasure in-person reunions. We learn new things about our classmates and ourselves - and sometimes, even, make new friends.

When I traveled to my college reunion, a woman at the Amtrak stop at the Milwaukee airport noticed my Marquette t-shirt, and we began to talk. Amina Gautier, Ph.D., was on her way to Milwaukee to find housing for her one-year visiting professorship as the Women's Chair in Humanistic Studies for the Association of Marquette University Women.

In a span of about 15 minutes, we talked about where she was originally from (Brooklyn, like my late husband), favorite books, Milwaukee, and Marquette.

It was only later that I learned she is an award-winning fiction writer. On March 21, the Southern Literary Review described her new book The Best That You Can Do as "a powerful, multi-award-winning collection of short stories centered on characters from



Liz Allen recently celebrated her 55th high school reunion with her classmates from Villa Maria Academy. You'll find her in the front row on the right.

the Puerto Rican and African diaspora." I have it on hold at Blasco Library.

I've never tried writing short stories but school reunions make me wish that I had that talent. At an allschool reunion for St. Andrew's at UPMC Park last year, a friend recalled how the nuns would yell at her for not paying attention in class. That's because she was busy looking out the window onto the 700 block of Raspberry Street, daydreaming about the lives of the passersby, she said. I would definitely devour a fictional account about the characters populating Raspberry Street if she would write it!

Even the bad memories from schooldays can provide inspiration to get the gang together again. Ron Waldinger and his friend, Tom Kaveny, play racquetball together, sometimes twice a week, and when they realized that it's been 50 years since they graduated from St. Andrew's, they decided to organize a reunion for Aug. 23 at the Cascade Club. "Social media has been the biggest factor in getting in touch with a lot of people," he said.

Ron and his three siblings grew up on West Seventh Street, two houses away from St. Andrew's Church, and he has fond memories of his school days, even though he also got in trouble back then. He figures the guys will likely bring up the half-dozen or so times Ron, only age 14, "stole" the keys to his brother's 1965 Pontiac LeMans to take his friends for

a spin. "I could barely see over the steering wheel," he said with a laugh. "And it didn't have power steering and it didn't have power brakes, so it was a struggle."

His class was so rowdy that the school canceled the eighth grade class trip. Looking at the class photo from that year, "You start to remember all the kids' personalities and how they behaved back then, good and bad. A lot of them, you can see, have an attitude," he said. "I don't know if it was because of the teacher. She was very strict. If you mispronounced her name, she had a holy fit."

Ron is 10 years younger than I am and he noted that, like me, "We have a lot of classmates that are no longer with us. It would be such a valuable and meaningful thing to just get together and talk about all those days back in the day."

Organizing school reunions may prove challenging as we age and especially after schools close. St. Andrew's shut its doors in 2006 but my friends and I have used other gatherings, including parish picnics and spaghetti dinners, to organize informal reunions.

Villa Maria Academy consolidated with Cathedral Prep in 2022 but the website prep-villa.com has information about reunions for both Villa and Prep, including details about the 5-year reunion for Prep's Class of 2020. Click on the alumni link to learn more.

Many public school districts in the Erie area also

#### **NEWS & OPINION**

do a good job of connecting with alumni. On fairviewschools.org, the Fairview School Foundation link notes that it provides mailings, including postage, for reunions and a guided campus tour.

"We think class reunions are a big deal. Please keep us posted on your events and how your classmates can be a part of these great gatherings," the website millcreekeducationfoundation.org states. It currently lists six McDowell reunions, starting with the Class of 1975 and going up to the Class of 2005.

Erica Erwin, the Erie School District's coordinator of public relations and strategic communications, isn't aware of a central site for Erie School District reunions but said she knows that graduates of Erie high schools take fierce pride in their schools and organize reunions via social media such as Facebook. Former Erie students also enjoy returning to their old schools, including those who attended Academy and/or Collegiate Academy, Erwin said. Daria Devlin, former Erie School Board member and now a Democratic candidate for Erie Mayor, was president of her Central High School class in 1995, now Erie High and formerly Tech Memorial. She organized 5, 10, and 20year reunions but the 25th would have been in 2020, the year COVID shut everything down. "After that, things fell off. I always enjoyed them and we got a decent turnout. With social media now, it's easier to stay in touch and keep up with people," she said. Still, getting together every 5 or 10 years is fun, she said, and she's been talking to people about organizing a 30th reunion.

Collegiate Academy (formerly Academy High) also hosts a Party on the Patio every summer for alumni, she said, and Strong Vincent alums also have organized reunions at their school.

It's not just school names that change; uses also evolve. The former Villa Maria Academy is now home to the Erie County Community College. On the day before our 2024 VMA reunion, the college advancement office graciously arranged a tour of our old school, allowing us to reminisce and also to get silly when we lined up on the inside balcony to toot out our Alma Mater song on kazoos.

In 1953, Villa High School moved to 2403 W. Eighth St. from its old red-brick building at West Eighth and

Plum streets. That building also included Villa Maria Elementary, Villa Maria College, and the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse; it has been transformed into affordable housing for seniors and families. The community college has preserved the beautiful tile floors in the school I attended while updating it to meet the technology needs of today. The tour was a chance to see the benefits of adaptive reuse and to learn more about the important mission of the community college.

Of course, successful reunions always need volunteers with special skills to keep the fun rolling. For Catherine McMahon Hundley, that means creating a quiz to test the memories of her classmates from the Villa Maria Academy Class of 1970, a year behind

"Why should people come back to Erie for their reunion? I'd say it's about reconnecting with the community, seeing how Erie has grown and changed, and revisiting the places that made it special in the first place."

— Christina Temple, director of communications at VisitErie

me. She calls her 20-question test "Villa Reflections" and some of them are easy and transferable to other classes.

For example, "Who was president of the United States the year we graduated?" (Richard Nixon for both of us).

But I was stumped by the question about how much a peanut butter cookie cost in the school cafeteria. Was it a nickel, 15 cents, a quarter, or 50 cents? My mom baked chocolate chip cookies for us to pack every day, so maybe I never bought a peanut butter one.

Catherine is a retired U.S. Army Colonel and a West Point graduate in nursing, but she compiles her quiz with the rigor and challenges any good teacher would, including adding an extra-credit question. "We were assigned to read the novel *Flowers for Algernon*. The story was adapted and made into a movie starring Cliff Robertson and Claire Bloom. We held a teleconference with Mr. Robertson who talked about his role in the story and ethical undertones of issues with people with intellectual disabilities. What was the name of the movie adaptation of the novel?"

When the movie was made in 1968, we would have gone to the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* to find the answer. Today, I simply Googled to find the answer but I will let readers do their own research.

Naturally, good reunions offer more than a pop quiz. A.J. Hanson, general manager of the Plymouth Tavern, said his business has "quite a few" class reunions scheduled this year, including the 65th reunion for the Academy High School Class of 1960. St. Benedict's Academy, which closed in 1988, also has held reunions at the Plymouth, as have many Catholic grade schools. "Especially for people from Erie, it's very nice to have them here. It's kind of home base and a familiar setting," he said.

A drink or two helps to "loosen everybody up a little," Hanson said. "But don't overdo it," he advised.

VisitErie doesn't keep data on whether school reunions bring people back to Erie. But, "I can say anecdotally that reunions are a powerful reason former Erie residents return home," said Christine Temple, the tourism agency's director of communications. When she attended her Mercyhurst Prep 30th reunion at the Erie Yacht Club last summer, out-oftowners also attended.

"A lot of them said they haven't been back in 20 or 30 years so it was nice to hear they made the effort to come home. Why should people come back to Erie for their reunion? I'd say it's about reconnecting with the community, seeing how Erie has grown and changed, and revisiting the places that made it special in the first place."

Liz Allen may be known as a reunion-crasher after she attends the 50-year j-school reunion at Marquette with college newspaper friends in June. You can reach her at lizerie@aol.com.

LECOM HEALTH

# Think F.A.S.T.

F.A.S.T. (Face drooping, Arm weakness, Speech difficulty and Time to call 911) is an easy way to remember the sudden signs of a stroke. LECOM Health Neurologist **Ryan Lynch, D.O.**, says if you experience symptoms of a stroke, do not try driving anywhere. Call 911! If a stroke happens while you're driving, stop and call 911. You should also note the time your symptoms start by taking a screenshot of the time with your phone. If you get to the emergency room within three hours, your stroke can be treated.

LECOMHealth.com

#### The Power of Nature: 40 Year Anniversary of Albion Storms

The deadliest tornado outbreak in Pennsylvania history

**By: Jonathan Burdick** 

A s a kid growing up in rural Crawford County during the 1980s and '90s, I thought about tornadoes *a lot*. If there was a tornado watch or warning (or, really, even a severe thunderstorm), I noticed the visible concern among adults. I'd heard the stories. Everybody seemed to have one. I also knew the signs and what to do. Some of my own first stories that I ever wrote were about a group of friends chasing tornadoes around Pennsylvania. Tornadoes, from what a young me simply assumed, were a common occurrence and constant deadly threat in our little corner of the state.

That, of course, isn't true. Pennsylvania is *far* from tornado alley. My fears were not irrational though. According to data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, there have been over 1,000 recorded tornado touch downs across the commonwealth since 1950 – and the fear that I saw on the faces of adults was due to fresh memories of the deadliest tornado outbreak in Pennsylvania history.

On May 31, 1985, now 40 years ago, this devastating outbreak struck Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Ontario. Dozens of twisters spawned throughout the region, claiming the lives of 89, injuring another 1,000, and causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damage. The National Weather Service explains that the historic outbreak resulted from "high levels of atmospheric instability ... triggered by the passage of a strong late-spring cold front" on an unseasonably hot spring day. Since this predated the implementation of the NEXRAD Doppler radar system (introduced in 1988 and drastically improving tornado predictions across the United States), many people in their paths only had minutes or even *seconds* to take cover.

In the early morning on that fateful Friday, the National Weather Service noted the possibility of severe weather that evening. At 4 p.m., they issued a thunderstorm warning which included northwestern Pennsylvania. Twenty-five minutes later, a Tornado Watch was officially issued for 5 through 11 p.m. The prediction proved eerily accurate as the outbreak's first tornado in Pennsylvania, which would soon devastate the small towns of Albion and Cranesville, touched down on the Ohio side of the state line at 4:59 p.m.

The tornado was an F4 on the Fujita Scale with winds reaching 260 miles per hour and a path width of 400 yards. Such winds can level houses, lift vehicles into the air with ease, and turn everyday items into deadly projectiles. As it approached Albion, the sky was described as an "eerie green and yellow." Hail pelted cars. According to the National Disaster Survey Report, it was approximately 5:05 p.m. when Gabby Brewster spotted the tornado southwest of town and rushed to the firehouse radio to broadcast a warning that, many later said, likely saved their



This year marks the 40th anniversary of the evening a series of deadly tornadoes touched down in Pennsylvania. Jonathan Burdick looks back on that day and pieces together the timeline of events through public records and personal accounts.

lives.

The National Weather Service's warning officially went out at 5:13 p.m., two minutes before Albion took a direct hit. The impact leveled a 10-block area, killing nine people, and destroying two trailer parks. Russ Loomis, 61, described to the Los Angeles Times how he witnessed the "football field" size tornado jump over his convenience store and then, within 15 seconds, the "neighborhood exploded." Entire blocks were "turned into twisted, crumbling jumbles of lumber, plaster, brick, tree limbs, [and] furniture."

"[I]t was all over in 30 or 40 seconds," Niles Copeland, who had just arrived home from work, told the New York Times. He'd been looking up in the sky for what he assumed was a jet.

Eugene O'Brien, 64, was outdoors when the tornado struck. The winds were paralyzing. He held onto railroad ties as the chaos surrounded him. "I thought I was dying," he later told the Erie Times-News.

In an interview with Toni Polancy, Jerry Ellis, then 33, explained how he received a call from a neighbor about the approaching tornado. As he ran outside to check on his family, his wife Brenda and their daughter Heather were running towards him yelling that they needed to warn their neighbors. They went inside and to the basement as Ellis ran up his street, pounding on doors and shouting at people to take cover. He made it home and to their basement just as the house was being ripped off its foundation. He and Brenda held tightly onto their daughter.

"It sounded like a gigantic vacuum groaning and sucking and thrashing," Ellis told Polancy. Their home was gone 20 seconds later. They were physically unharmed.

Erie Times-News reporter George Miller interviewed Kathy Gibson, then 30, who was home with her two children when she heard what sounded like a train. Having survived a tornado only two years earlier, she recognized the sound and grabbed her young son while yelling for her napping teenage daughter.

"I opened the [basement] door and the stairs were gone," she told Miller. "Everything just came down." They were trapped, but fortunately all survived with only minor injuries.

The tornado continued towards Cranesville where it decimated Kennedy's Trailer Park, resulting in three more fatalities. In her mobile home, Christine Luthie, as later described to reporter Pat Howard, heard the approaching roar. Making a split-second



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choice that likely saved their lives, she picked up her toddler and ran for the woods. They were knocked to the ground by debris, but within seconds, their mobile home was gone. Only the stairs remained.

By 5:17 p.m., it was over. The tornado left a path of destruction over 14 miles long with around 80 reported injuries and over 300 homes and buildings destroyed or seriously damaged. Many houses were ripped completely from their foundations. The smell of natural gas was strong as downed powerlines sparked nearby.

That was only one of the dozens of tornadoes that tore through the region that day, leaving behind paths of scorched earth. An F2 tornado spawned in Linesville, traveling 4 miles over 5 minutes and killing one. An F3 touched down outside of Saegertown. At 5:25 p.m., another F4, also over 400 yards wide, hit the ground east of Waterford and traveled nearly 30 miles over 30 minutes. It destroyed homes north of Union City and killed dozens of cattle on a local farm. There were reports of a farmhouse completely lifted off of its foundation and a wagon thrown over a mile away. On its path, it leveled 50 more buildings and thousands of trees as it passed through Elgin and then Corry before crossing into Clymer, New York where it dissipated. There were no fatalities, but at least 17 were injured.

Meanwhile, east of Pymatuning State Park, another lethal F4 was on the ground. Over the course of an hour, it crossed 56 miles through Jamestown, Atlantic, Cochranton, Cooperstown, and Cherry Tree. This injured over 125 and resulted in another 16 fatalities.

The nightmarish evening spawned tornadoes in

Centerville, Tionesta, Lamont, Tidioute, Big Bend, Kane, Big Beaver, and Watsontown, each ranging from F2 to F4 in strength. There was also an F5 the only recorded F5 in Pennsylvania history – that traveled 47 miles between 6:30 p.m. and 7:35 p.m. and slammed into Wheatland, resulting in another 18 deaths and 310 injuries.

On May 31, 1985 ... dozens of twisters spawned throughout the region, claiming the lives of 89, injuring another 1,000, and causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damage. The National Weather Service explains that the historic outbreak resulted from "high levels of atmospheric instability ... triggered by the passage of a strong late-spring cold front" on an unseasonably hot spring day.

Communities were left in shambles. Many survivors were hospitalized for days. And then there were the deaths. Each person who died that day had their own story, their own family and friends left to grieve

ERIE TIMES NEWS, JUNE 2, 198



#### **GOVERNOR COMFORTS TORNADO VICTIMS**

Gov. Dick Thornburgh (center) tries to comfort Mrs. Floyd (Alice) Valentine (white hair) Saturday afternoon in Albion. Val-entine's home at Pearl and Thornton Streets was one of more

than 100 destroyed when a killer tornado ripped through this southwestern Erie County community of 1,800 Friday afternoon. (See related story Page 1A. Photo by Dan Pintea.

The community was collectively shocked, grief-stricken, and overwhelmed in the aftermath of the 1985 tornadoes. Then governor Dick Thornburgh declared a state of emergency and urged President Ronald Regan to send aid via The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), who set up 12 disaster relief centers in western Pennsylvania.

and pick up the pieces.

In Albion, among the fatalities was Luke Stahlsmith, a kindergarten student at Northwestern Elementary School. After neighbor Don Wickwire warned the family of the incoming tornado, a 4-month pregnant Sandra Stahlsmith, then 35, yelled for her children to get to the basement. They sat against the wall of their fruit cellar. As the first floor collapsed, a wall fell onto her as she held Luke in her arms, his neck pinned against a table. She tried with all of her strength to use her back to lift the wall off them, but it was simply too heavy. She heard her son's last breaths while waiting to be rescued. "I'll never sleep again," she told the Associated Press days later, tears in her eyes.

"Everyone knows someone who lost a family member. Nobody really escaped the pain," Albion Mayor Bonda Dahlin told the Erie Times-News.

The other deaths in Albion and Cranesville were Debra Sherman, Stanley Kireta, Frances Kireta, Helen Sabovik, Jodi Lynn Snyder, Lena Keith, Lydia Taylor, Marie Eagley, Norman Elliot, Ralph Hecker, and William Revak. Each had their own story.

Reporter Ed Mathews wrote that it was "difficult to realize the scope of the pain and the heartbreak" until one saw the devastation in person and spoke with the survivors. When Governor Dick Thornburgh arrived the next day following the mobilization of the National Guard, he was described as being nearly in tears the entire day. He noted the "awful feeling of helplessness" over the destruction.

Ten Pennsylvania counties were declared disaster areas. State aid funding passed unanimously in Harrisburg and the governor personally called the White House to request federal aid, which was authorized by President Ronald Reagan that Monday. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) opened 12 disaster relief centers across western Pennsylvania. Donations of money, food, clothing, bedding, and more overwhelmed volunteers within the first day. The Times Publishing Company operated a relief effort and received over 2,000 phone calls. Residents offered affected families rooms in their homes, vacant apartments, and mobile campers. Dozens of organizations assisted with efforts and volunteers came from all over to assist along with the Red Cross and Salvation Army.

"While it is true that killer storms are - fortunately – few and far between here, they can happen and they did happen on May 31, 1985," the editors of the Erie Times-News reflected a few days after the deadly storms. "We have to live with that knowledge."

Three years later, the Associated Press published an article on the rebuilding of Albion. The town and its surviving residents were described as resilient, but they were also forever changed.

"People here still cringe the minute there's a dark cloud in the sky," stated Paul McKnight.

They had witnessed the immense power of nature firsthand. It wouldn't be forgotten. It couldn't be forgotten.

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

#### FEATURE

#### Creating Culture: Local Artist JC Nickles Delivers His Vision While Helping Others

Prolific creator and promoter passionate about homegrown talent

#### By: Amy VanScoter

The local music scene in Erie has no shortage of talented artists. Beyond the success stories, there are numerous musicians honing their skills while seeking opportunities to shine. Whether starting out at open mics or putting in behind-thescenes work, the full scope of talent in Erie is not always heard by the majority but is definitely felt while creating the culture. In smaller venue spaces where genre boundaries are pushed, I first learned about JC Nickles. A successful local artist casually remarked, "He's the reason why so many artists in Erie exist. He's given so many people their start."

I quickly learned that Nickles wears many hats. Hosting open mics at Basement Transmissions on Wednesdays, at Philly on the Rocks on Sundays, and serving as the latter's booking director, his plate is full. Nickles is a singer-songwriter of acoustic, punk, hip-hop, alternative, rock, rap, and experimental music. He's also a producer, actor, director, and filmmaker. In addition, he is a music promoter for N.E.A.R. (New Era Artists Revolution), which hosts live variety shows and showcases artists on YouTube. N.E.A.R. focuses on local, independent, and underground arts and entertainment.

Originally from Pittsburgh, Nickles explained that his early childhood experiences shaped his love of music. From exposure to different genres, environments, and vocal accents through travel, and growing up in a time when MTV was mostly music videos. Asking him to describe his vibe, he says, "Martial arts, pro wrestling, music not pushed through mainstream media, and music from other countries with a mild touch of a mad scientist and an interest in psychology, then you pretty much know who JC Nickles is."

"I've been creating music since I was 8 years old on a guitar with nylon strings and on a keytar I got from Toys R Us, but I didn't take it seriously until I was 14, a year after I got my electric guitar. I owned an acoustic for a bit, but when I got the electric I became a songwriter," he said. Nickles explained that he often channels his emotions and energy into his instruments and gets what he calls "writer's flow," sometimes writing up to five songs in one day.

Nickles feels that, although he has fun in the studio, writing impactful lyrics and making music with a purpose is paramount. "I only write and perform live to share a message, my belief, and to express myself. I have a great time making albums with different styles of music on it, but the songs are very sincere. Live, I perform personal and worldly acoustic rock-alternative songs either backed by my drummer Bochi or solo." He explained that the songs he performs come from observing his surroundings, world issues, and different levels of experiences. "The songs I play live are original; however, *2020 VISION* involves music from myself and other producers such as former Erie locals David Lomorro, MadClock, Cal Ray All Day, Jason X and FiendX Da Pennywise," Nickles said.



Hosting regular open mic nights at Philly on the Rocks and Basement Transmissions, local musician JC Nickles sat down with Amy VanScoter to discuss his style, his current projects, his story, and his vision for the local music scene.

The album trilogy 2020 VISION began 10 years ago, when Nickles said he was observing the world through the internet. "I began showcasing songs for an unreleased album titled *Divide & Conquer* between 2015 and 2016. However, it was tough to find time to settle down and go into the studio as a band, so I decided to release an album I could tackle on my own. That album turned into a 5-year trilogy. The first single on the album, "Bad Intentions," was focused on my belief of where society was going in 2020. What I thought was going to be one album turned into more," Nickles said.

Outside of working with many bands via Gimp Guy Underground Promos with Alex Harrilla as a sound technician and promoter from 2011 to 2021, Nickles' local music career began at Basement Transmissions, performing there in 2011 at their original location on State Street. "I would help with repairs, clean, organize, and run sound for a decent amount of shows. I got to experience some of the local music scene, all while attending the open mics at The Crooked i," said Nickles.

The Crooked i, a venue that closed in 2014, is where Nickles says he met a lot of local musicians and encouraged those who are a strong force in the local music scene today. "My best example would be Brooke Surgener. I'm sure she reached out to more than just me, but it's cool I was one of the people she reached out to when she was just starting out." He continues, "It's odd to think she was ever nervous about being on stage in front of anyone; she did a great job then and does wonderful work now." Nickles was a regular for years at many of Erie's local music hot spots – working sound, booking, and performing at PACA, The Beer Mug, and Bobby's Place.

"The Erie music scene is and always has been capable of so much, which is what made me want to work with the local artists and stick with it for 13 years now," Nickles said. "I'd like to see more people take a chance on the unfamiliar, utilize the variety in this city, and give it a main stage. With N.E.A.R., we respect and appreciate differences. We believe variety, especially through entertainment, is the only way to showcase how much we have in common with each other and how our differences can strengthen us more than divide us," Nickles said.

N.E.A.R xp is a local independent variety program that can be found at youtube.com/TheNEARxp DeadMetal

Amy VanScoter, a fan of local music and the former Crooked i, is the founder/owner of Infinite Love Yoga, LLC, and can be found at infinitelove.yoga.

#### Take Your Beer For a Walk: It's Gonna Be MAY

A sudsy stroll through the historic West Bayfront

#### By: Jeff McCullor

Guys, we made it. It's finally, finally safe to put away those mittens and don your sunglasses and short sleeves instead. Warm weather is here and that means you can comfortably drink a beer on your walk through town without fear of icicles forming on your upper lip. This time we're strolling along a particularly stellar route through the West Bayfront neighborhood. So get your sunnies, your barley pop, and let's hit the bricks!

We'll start our May journey at the foot of Cherry Street on the western end of Bayview Park, home to the big "Erie" sign, an impressive 10-foot by 5-foot sculpture overlooking our bayfront. Installed in 2020, it has become one of the most popular photo spots in town, especially when one of our famous third-best sunsets is happening in the background. Cheers, Erie! You're looking better every day!

From your vantage point overlooking the bay, we'll hit our next stop by sim-

ply turning around and walking south on Cherry to the next corner, West Second Street. This is the western edge of New Jerusalem, Erie's first African American neighborhood. In the early 1800s this area was purchased by William Himrod, an early Erie entrepreneur and abolitionist involved in ironworks manufacturing. The neighborhood was meant to be a safe refuge for free Black folks wary of slave hunters, runaway enslaved people, and poor or destitute whites.

See that ball field? The one with the wonderful mural? Pontiac Field lies before you, named after the Erie Pontiacs who played here between 1936 and 1956. The field was dedicated to the team in 2010 and honors Erie's most celebrated African American sports team. Sam Jethroe played for the Pontiacs, eventually joining the Boston Braves in 1949. Cheers, Pontiacs!

Next, cross West Second heading south on Cherry Street. We're traversing three blocks up to 516 Cherry, the new digs for Herb & Honey Bakery, where we'll trade in one form of car-



Take advantage of Erie's lack of open container law and take your beer for a walk. This month, Jeff McCullor takes you on a scenic and historic walk through the West Bayfront neighborhood – made all the better with a cup of suds in hand.

bohydrate for another. Sip that beer along the way and give a wave at the folks at 202 Cherry if they're on their porch. Local band, Psych Patrol, played here during Porchfest two years ago, a neighborhood-wide event you should not miss, returning each fall.

When you arrive at the bakery check out that sweet floor tile, the gigan-

tic picture window overlooking the production area, and my favorite, the stuffed pretzels. Buy them all before I do! Cheers, Herb & Honey!

Drink local, and keep on walking.

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

#### Edwina Tries ... Open Mic Night

Philly On The Rocks open mic Sundays are casual and welcoming

#### By: Edwina Capozziello

Lull disclosure, I almost chickened out this month. I am certainly not what one would call "shy" but I do have basic self-preservation instincts and I know a lot of talented musicians. That list includes my partner, who joined me on my recent trip to Philly On The Rocks (401 W. 18th St.) for one of their Sunday evening open mic nights. anxiety began to set in. I decided to forgo advice to have something prepared and instead thought I'd go with the flow. When I arrived at the bar, I started to sweat. "Maybe we're just here to support friends and I'll think of something else to do for my column," I said. I didn't add my name to the signup sheet, just sat near the front with a strange cocktail and an unnatural smile on my face.

#### Philly's is in Little Italy and certainly has a midtown, dive bar feel in the best way. You can come as you are and feel welcomed.

Philly's holds an open mic many Sundays from 6 to 10 p.m., hosted by a revolving list of local Erie favorites. The night I visited was on Easter Sunday and was hosted by Michelle Taylor (aka Elle Taylor, 40 Under 40 Class of 2023), a local singer-songwriter and leader of Elle Taylor Band. The event featured an egg hunt with a Pabst neon sign prize, and was well attended.

In the days leading up to the event,

Then fate intervened. Elle got on stage to present the next act but they weren't ready yet. So, she decided to do an original song or two of her own. I know her songs. I can sing along with many of them without preparation. She looked to the audience for suggestions of what she should do first, I piped up with an idea and offered to join her to sing background vocals. It was fun! It was over quickly and it gave



This month, contributing writer Edwina Capozziello gets over her stage fright and steps up to the open mic at Philly on the Rocks in Erie's Little Italy. Check out the venue to catch up-and-coming artists or muster your bravery and give your act a whirl.

me a giggly endorphin rush.

The evening featured other locals like Rusty B, Don Corey, Jeremy Martin, and JC Nickles as well as Kenya Vaun from Philadelphia who was in town visiting her mom. Everyone paid attention, applauded, and were kind to one another. Philly's is in Little Italy and certainly has a midtown, dive bar feel in the best way. You can come as you are and feel welcomed. Plus, the place has killer food (it's vegan cheesesteak featured as a 2025 Can't Miss Dish).

Edwina is Erie's (self-proclaimed) biggest fan who loves being a tourist in our own town. If you have an idea of something new she should try you can email her at edwina. capozziello@gmail.com

#### COLUMNS

#### **Bird of the Month: Yellow Warbler**

A sweet, sweet bird

f you want to see a Yellow Warbler, just go to Presque Isle State Park sometime this month. They can be found just about anywhere in the park. Their abundance is so great that I have heard many out-of-town birders exclaim, "PI has to be the Yellow Warbler capital of the world."

But their regular presence doesn't mean they're uninteresting. In fact, they are predominantly a brilliant yellow, and if you've never seen one, you may gasp upon seeing one for the first time. I know I did. When people talk about warblers being little gems of the forest, these birds lead the way.

A mere 5 inches in length, Yellow Warblers are denizens of the understory of the forest. Flitting about through shrubs and small trees, they glean insects from the branches and leaves. In general, their preference is for their habitat to be a little wet with dense shrubbery. According to the PA Game Commission, up to two-thirds of their diet can be caterpillars.

There are a few differences between males and females of this species (called sexual dimorphism).



This month, lead shorebird monitor for the Erie Bird Observatory Mary Birdsong tells us all about the Yellow Warbler, a charming, migratory beauty with a sweet little call.

Females have olive green upperparts (the back side of the bird, from neck to tail) and yellow underparts (the belly side of the bird). Males are similar but their yellow is brighter and they sport chestnut-colored streaks on their breasts.

And it's the males who do the singing in this species,

when they are perched on shrubs and trees, when approaching nests to feed nestlings, and periodically in flight. Their song is a multipart series of crisp notes that flow together into a sweet whole that is oftentimes characterized as sounding like "sweet, sweet, sweet, I'm so sweet."

Since they stay and nest in our region all summer, and their preferred shrubby-edge habitat is fairly common, these beautiful birds are easily found. I used to see them on the bluffs by the Bayfront Parkway before they were cleared, but any patch of shrubs may be suitable. I plant my backyard with many native shrubs and one of my most desired outcomes is to have a pair nest there one year.

Keep your ears open for its sweet call, and you may just find one of these lovely jewels nearby.

Mary Birdsong is the lead shorebird monitor for Erie Bird Observatory. Learn more at eriebirdobservatory.org or on their social media channels. She can be reached at mbirdsong@ eriereader.com

#### The Reader Beat Monthly Recap

Summary of April council meetings

#### **By: Alana Sabol**

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

#### City Council Meeting on Wednesday, Apr. 2:

An ordinance amending Part 7, General Offences, to establish Article 723, entitled "Unlawful Manufacture of Firearms" to add prohibitions on the use of 3D printers, to impose prohibitions relating to the transfer, use, or conversion of unfinished firearms, the manufacture of firearms, and to prescribe additional penalties for violations of the Article was motioned to be tabled but failed in a tie vote. Councilmembers Jasmine Flores, Chuck Nelson, and Tyler Titus voted no to tabling the ordinance. Following that, the council voted on the ordinance but also failed due to a tie vote, with councilmembers Mel Witherspoon, Ed Brzezinski, and Maurice Troop voting no. Brzezinski suggested holding off on the ordinance until after the Supreme Court makes a ruling on a similar ordinance passed in Philadelphia. Public comments also raised concerns over this ordinance, claiming that it is considered a gun ban which is prohibited by state law. Constituent Keith Hammer said, "We need to focus more on crimes that are actually hurting people. There's only been two cases in the City of Erie that I can find where they've had so-called ghost guns."

#### County Council Meeting on Tuesday, Apr. 8:

An ordinance for the supplemental appropriation of \$160,736 from the DCED Existing Owner Occupied

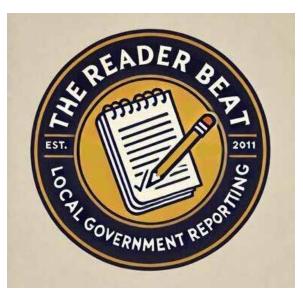
Housing Grant and the creation of an existing owner occupied housing bureau was passed unanimously. The primary issue during the meeting arose during public comments, where many constituents emphasized taking the county budget audit to the Pennsylvania Auditor General in light of an Erie Times News article highlighting a report from the County Controller's Office,

"If we have decided as a community that Erie is a sanctuary city, we need to hold those values. Erie should not be cooperating with immigration enforcement under any circumstances." —Carlos Mora, Erie County United

revealing that County Executive Brenton Davis made changes to the 2025 budget without council approval. Candidate for County Executive Perry Wood said: "I just want to say thank you to the people that came here today and stuck up for this issue and reminded you that the power of the purse string lies with you. It's your responsibility to make sure that an entity like the Auditor General's Office looks into this."

#### City Council Meeting on Wednesday, Apr. 16:

An ordinance for the sum of \$5,000,000 for upgrades to the expERIEnce Children's Museum Facility and passthrough funding provided from the PA Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) Grant was passed unanimously. The council chambers were full of constituents, some there to express their concern about immigration and detainments in Erie. Specifically, some speakers referenced a video of a man being detained on



Parade Street during a traffic stop. Constituents questioned if there was a possible collaboration between the Erie Police Department (EPD) and ICE agents. Carlos Mora of Erie County United referenced Erie's status as a Certified Welcoming City, "If we have decided as a community that Erie is a sanctuary city, we need to hold those values," Mora said. "Erie should not be cooperating with immigration enforcement under any circumstances."

#### County Council Meeting on Tuesday, Apr. 22:

An ordinance for a supplemental \$77,330 to the 2025 library fund budget for state aid-district deferred revenue passed unanimously. This meeting was less than 10 minutes long.

#### What's coming up this month?

County Council Meeting, May 6 at 6 p.m. City Council Meeting, May 7 at 9 a.m. City Council Meeting, May 21 at 6:30 p.m.

#### Gem City Style: Musician Erika Kuhn

A study of soul, poise, and purpose

#### **By: Jessica Hunter**

he first time I saw Erika perform I was captivated. At 31, she's become a commanding voice - both literally and figuratively - within Erie's music scene. A dynamic vocalist, multi-instrumentalist, educator, and proud mother to a 6-year-old daughter, Erika balances it all with soul, poise, and purpose. In the midst of planning her wedding, she still finds time to light up local stages and mentor young artists at World of Music and St. George School.

"I don't like the idea of staying in one box," Erika says. "I want to be able to go where the feeling goes."

That fluidity defines her music. A blend of soul, jazz, gospel, and R&B pulses through her work, drawing from influences like Alicia Keys, Whitney Houston, Beyoncé, Tracy Chapman, and Yebba. But even with echoes of her idols, Erika's voice is unmistakably her own - rich, expressive, and emotionally honest. She laughs as she says she received the nickname "Erika Keys" when she was starting out.

Music found her early. Born and raised in Erie, she grew up in a household with gospel and classic soul on rotation. After attending Slippery Rock University to study music therapy, she returned home and got to work - performing and teaching.

Teaching, as it turns out, has been an unexpected love. "I just wanted a part-time job after college," she laughs, "but once I started teaching, it made me love music even more. You have to break it down, explain it in new ways - it made me think differently." At World of Music, she offers lessons in voice, piano, and guitar, while also directing a children's musical at the elementarv school.

Erika's expressive flair doesn't stop with her music. Her fashion is as fluid and personal as her sound. "I'm always changing it up. One day I'm in streetwear, the next I'm in full glam," she says. "It's all about expressing where I am emotionally - and that's what my music does too." Big earrings, bold eyeliner, and boots with personality: "I like to wear something that makes me feel powerful and present. If I feel good, I sing better."



Jessica Hunter invited local musician Erika Kuhn to her downtown studio to discuss her story, her career in the local music scene and in children's music education, as well as her personal sense of style.

She sees Erie's creative community growing stronger. "There are so many amazing artists here – poets, musicians, dancers - and I think we really fully support each other," she notes. "I'd love to see more collaborative spaces and platforms that let us grow together."

When asked what keeps her rooted in Erie, her answer is simple: "This is home. And there's something beautiful about creating where you were raised. I want to be part of making our community even more vibrant."

In a city where creativity and community go hand-inhand, Erika Kuhn stands out as both a captivating performer and a dedicated mentor. From the spotlight to the classroom, she's crafting a legacy rooted in connection, creativity, and soul.

Find out where to catch Erika live this summer on her Facebook at facebook.com/erikakuhnmusic

Gem City Style is a monthly column featuring an intimate Q&A with someone making a creative impact in Erie. If you or someone you know would make a good fit for a future Gem City Style, email jessica@eriereader.com

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#### **EVENTS**

# **AUCTION** May 15 - 18

# **NEW TIME!** 6 - 10 P.M.



# WQLN.org/Auction

#### Erie Philharmonic Closes 2024-25 Season with Verdi's Requiem

And join chorus members for a Drink Along, Sing Along fundraiser

#### SATURDAY, MAY 10

he Erie Philharmonic is finishing their 2024-25 Symphonic Season with a duology of introspective music on the human experience, ending in a performance of Giuseppe Verdi's Requiem. Featuring soloists Keely Futterer, Lindsay Amman, Dane Suraez, and Christopher Humbert, the Erie Philharmonic Chorus will accompany the orchestra under the direction of Thomas Brooks. The concert will also feature Toru Takemitsu's Funeral Music from the 1989 Ridley Scott film Black Rain. Takamitsu wrote over 90 film scores in his career, serving as an influential figure in the Japanese New Wave.

"Experience the emotional depth of Verdi's *Requiem*, an epic masterpiece familiar to everyone," the Erie Philharmonic describes. "The program also features Takemitsu's *Funeral Music*, an evocative piece that paints a landscape of introspection and solemn beauty. This season finale is not just a concert but a powerful tribute to the human spirit, promising an unforgettable evening of reflection and grandeur."

In addition, the Erie Philharmonic Chorus will be hosting a fundraiser



The musicians and chorus of the Erie Philharmonic are poised to present their final offering for the 2024-2025 season with Verdi's *Requiem*. Additionally, the folks that make up the adult chorus will be holding a fundraiser at the Brewerie later this month.

called "Drink Along, Sing Along" at the Brewerie at Union Station on Wednesday, May 14 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Attendees will be helping to support the educational programs of the Erie Philharmonic Chorus while also enjoying an evening of singing, eating, and drinking local brews.—Thomas Taylor Verdi's Requiem // 7:30 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$17-\$61 // For tickets: eriephil.org

Drink Along, Sing Along // 6: 30 p.m. // The Brewerie at Union Station, 123 W. 14th St. // Tickets \$25, not including drinks/food // For tickets: eriephil.org

#### Dig into Spring with Plant Sale at Penn State Behrend

Support master gardeners who lend a hand across the county

#### SATURDAY, MAY 10

Flowers and greenery are (finally!) popping up all over – the Erie Zoo, the Erie City school gardens, community gardens. All of those (and more than 25 other long term volunteer projects) just happen to be supported by the Penn State Extension Master Gardeners of Erie County.

So why not show the group some love and stop by their 18th annual plant sale? Held rain or shine on the Behrend campus, the event will have more than 30 master gardeners on site to answer questions and direct patrons to plenty of perennials, native plants, veggie seedlings, and more.

The pros know to arrive early for the best pick of hundreds of plants from these gardeners across the county. All sales are cash or check only, but rates are reasonable (read, good deals for a good cause) and things move quickly. "We will be focusing on native plants this year. We will have educational ma-



Help support the Master Gardeners of Erie County at their annual plant sale at Penn State Behrend. Don't miss this opportunity to learn from those who know the most about local flora – more than 30 master gardeners will be on hand to answer questions and offer gardening suggestions while selling seedlings.

terial about native plants and also info on invasive species to look out for," said Cyndy Beck, chairperson of the sale this year.

"The funds raised through our annual plant sale enable us to provide horticultural education and outreach programs for both children and adults across Erie County. These events also help support our community garden initiatives, fostering green spaces that unite neighborhoods and promote sustainable gardening practices," said Lisa Rand, master gardener coordinator for Erie County.

Thanks to such fundraising efforts, an additional event on May 20 will be offered free of charge to the community. "Restoring Nature, An Evening with Doug Tallamy" will be held in the Reed Union Building at Penn State Behrend. Dr. Tallamy will share insights on ecological landscaping and enhancing biodiversity. Those interested must register online by May 19. —Gretchen Gallagher Durney

9 a.m. to noon // Wilson Picnic Grove at Penn State Behrend // For more info visit: extension.psu.edu/programs/master-gardener/ counties/erie



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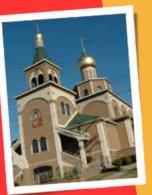
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#### **EVENTS**

#### May Events at Basement Transmissions

Slackjaw, Murphy's Law, Total Chaos, and a Stuff Swap

#### THURSDAY, MAY 15

Basement Transmissions is going into the summer concert season in full swing, with the help of Idlestar Productions, fresh off a recent show with metalcore band Unearth on May 1. Two national touring acts will grace their stage, starting with South Carolina metal up-and-comers Slackjaw on May 15 and New York City Hardcore legends Murphy's Law on tour with California punk band Total Chaos on May 28.

Slackjaw is a groove metal band from South Carolina Influenced by Black Label Society and Pantera, who released their first album in 2020. They currently have 34,000 views on their latest video "Ascend" on YouTube within just a few weeks of its release. They are on tour with fellow low-country band Razorgrave, hailing from Greenville, South Carolina. Razorgrave is more thrash in their approach, relying on chunkier grooves and breakneck beats. Rounding out this evening of metal will be Shiver and Blaspheme.

The next mosh-worthy event will be with veteran hardcore-punk band Murphy's Law, who have been the life of the party since 1982, with their fun, beer drinking-inspired songs. The last time Murphy's Law graced the Gem City was when they opened for The Beastie Boys and Public Enemy on April 12, 1987 at the (then) Erie Civic Center. Over the years there have been various members in the band, but mainstay Jimmy G still leads Murphy's Law as they continue to bring their raucous party from town to town. Along for their Crucial Bar-B-Q is hardcore punk band Total Chaos from Pomona, California. Formed in 1989, and releasing their first full length LP in 1993, Total Chaos are known for their social and political views, helping organize Food Not Bombs events, The Orange County Peace Punks, and supporting the Big Mountain Indian Reservation. The last time Total Chaos was in town was in 1995 when they played a legendary show at The Erie Art Museum Annex in 1995, which ended in (total) chaos. Support for the show will be local mainstays Mala Sangre and thrash masters Maniacal Device.

In the same vein as DIY ethics and punk ethos, Basement Transmissions is also hosting a "Stuff Swap" on May 18. This eco-friendly idea is a way to declutter your home while discovering things that would serve a better purpose. Attendees can bring gently used clothing, books, toys, home decor, electronics, kitchen gadgets, and miscellaneous items to Basement Transmissions for repurposing. There is a \$3 donation at the door to help cover the cost to host the event, with the leftover money to be donated after the event.—Larry Wheaton

Slackjaw: May 15 // 6 to 11p.m. // \$15 in advance, \$20 day of show

Stuff Swap: May 18 // 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. // Free

Murphy's Law & Total Chaos: May 28 // 5:30 p.m. // \$20 in advance, \$25 day of show

For more information on any of these events: facebook.com/basement.transmissions





Don't miss the opportunity to see the legendary Murphy's Law (pictured) as they take the stage at local venue Basement Transmissions. Additionally, the venue has planned a Slackjaw show as well as a Stuff Swap, all happening throughout May.



mer, NY

#### Mother Earth Day at Poetry Park 636 East 22<sup>nd</sup> St



Celebrating poetry that cultivates our love of Mother Earth as Home. Featuring local poets Niecey Nicole and Matt Borczon, plus open mic. Kids Welcome!

Saturday, May 17 2-3 PM



#### **EVENTS**

#### WhatARTu Inspires Young Artists to Create and Celebrate

OpenedEyes' youth gallery returns for third year

#### SATURDAY, MAY 17

The Martin Luther King Center will, once again, feature a diverse gallery of artwork from students in grades K through 12 across Erie County, titled *WhatARTu*.

Celebrating its third year and collection, *WhatARTu* is a youth art gallery hosted by OpenedEyes that challenges young creators to tell their stories through visual art while answering the question, "What are you?"

"WhatARTu is about telling the audience who you are," lead coordinator Ceaser Westbrook (40 Under 40 Class of 2020) said. "It can be about something you have done, something you've been through, something that has happened. Anything that allows the viewer to learn more about the artist."

Art of all sizes and media have been accepted and encouraged, further liberating the artists to express themselves. As of last year, works of poetry and dance have even made their way onto the scene.

Westbrook reflected on his experience working on the show, describing it as "fulfilling" upon seeing the excitement and passion these students put into their creations. "These works have



The organization OpenedEyes is bringing their third annual student art show, *WhatARTu?*, to the Martin Luther King center for a one-day show. The event's goal is to give creative kids in Erie an outlet to show their art to the community, all while helping them reach an answer to the titular existential question.

had a lot of detail and expression put into them."

As always, the goal of the event is to bring on new participants for the following year and to increase the number of organizations involved. As the project grows, organizers hope to continue to add new key elements and attractions to the show.

The gallery will only be open for one day, which is an aspect Westbrook hopes to change someday. Each year, the collections have been featured at different venues and will continue to switch it up in future installations. "This helps to keep things fresh and allows the public to experience what these locations have to offer," Westbrook explained.

In addition to the event, food trucks, raffle auctions, face painting, craft vendors, caricature drawings, and more will be made available to the public. —Cassandra Gripp

Noon to 5 p.m. // Martin Luther King Center, 312 Chestnut St. // Free // For more info: facebook.com/openedeyesnonprofit

#### CommUnity Seedling Swap/Sale

Get to know and grow with fellow urban farmers and gardeners **SUNDAY. MAY 18** 

Spring is often a time of new beginnings, and what better way to bring in the season than to grow something new – whether on a windowsill or in a backyard, your own personal garden is an easy way to welcome the warmer weather.

Whether you're just getting started or have been growing a garden for years, the CommUnity Seedling Swap/Sale will have something for gardeners and urban farmers of every variety. After the success of their third annual Seed Swap in March, Eat Your Yard and the 1020 Collective have teamed up again to promote the event's progression into the next phase of food growth.

"The inspiration for both the Seed and Seedling Swaps is to bring people together to share information, resources, inspiration, and camaraderie around growing food, especially in the city," said Tess Frawley of Eat Your Yard. "Most small-scale growers have more



Join the folks at 10/20 Collective, alongside scads of local farmers and nonprofits as they grow their free community seed swap event into a seedling swap. Exchange your extra seedlings with other home-gardeners and urban farmers in Erie and diversify your garden.

than enough seeds for their own gardens, and this is an opportunity to tap into and try out what others may have grown."

The event will include Steph Thauer of Raintree Farms and the Conscious Food Project, Mckenzie Sprague of Ponchos Greenhouse (who will be selling florals), and a multitude of other urban farmers and teachers ready to swap seedlings and information with those in attendance.

Attendees are welcome to bring food crops for swap, ornamental bulbs, cuttings, or dug-up plant dividings, as well as gardening tools. It is recommended for those in attendance to bring boxes, totes, or other receptacles to carry plants home in. —Ally Kutz

10 a.m. to 2 p.m. // 1020 Collective, 1020 Holland St. // Free // For more information: 1020collective.com



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Beer on the Bay 2025 is back on Saturday, July 26 at the Rebich Investments Amphitheater at Liberty Park in Erie, PA! Enjoy a summer day filled with craft brews, lake views, and good vibes, all for a great cause. A portion of proceeds supports The ANNA Shelter, helping animals in need.

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#### Erie Reader Book Club: May 2025

#### Summer by Ali Smith

#### SUNDAY, MAY 25

The Erie Reader Book Club will be reading and discussing the novel Summer by Ali Smith in correspondence with the Summer Preview Erie Reader issue.

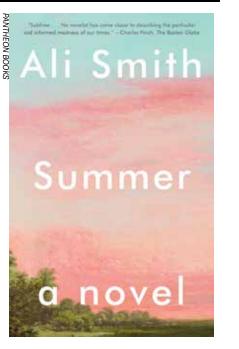
The final installment in her Seasonal Quartet, Ali Smith's Summer tells a story of both past and present: in the present, two starkly different teenaged siblings find themselves at odds in a world in trouble. Sacha, a young activist, starkly contrasts her individualist brother, Robert. In the past, a different brother and sister enjoy a lovely summer, knowing that they're living on borrowed time.

Written during the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the book uses not only the lockdowns in its plot, but other modern global topics including the conclusion of the Brexit pro-

cess, Black Lives Matter protests, and immigration.

Each novel in the quartet is contrasted with a Shakespearean work, with Summer set against *The Winter's Tale*. Although the final in its series, it is not necessary to have read Smith's quartet in order – although characters from the previous novels do appear, their context within this story easily exists outside their other iterations.

Ultimately, *Summer* is the story of people on the verge of change: family members who think they're strangers, understanding where they begin and what they have in common when it seems they're only at odds with one another. This and more will be discussed at the May meeting. All are welcome to attend with no commitment to join in the future. —Ally Kutz



**EVENTS** 

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



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#### Miss Tethered Immersive's REWIND '90s Themed Event? As if!

Get into the drama (literally) at Room 33

#### SATURDAY, JUN. 7

There is nothing the City of Erie loves more than events that are nostalgic for the '90s, plus novel theatrical experiences – and we're getting both with Tethered Immersive's REWIND: A '90s Themed Immersive Pop-up. Tethered Immersive is a first-of-its kind organization for Erie, combining dance, theater, music, and film, as well as audience participation, and it's bringing a taste of that to Room 33, with a, like, totally cool vibe.

Tethered Immersive's creative leadership includes Adele Crotty, Jesse James, John C. Lyons, Kristen Smith, Jo Theisen, and Andona Zacks-Jordan, while Crotty and Smith are the lead writers and producers for the REWIND production. Crotty and Smith said that your ticket gets you into an hour-long performance that takes you behind the scenes and "amid all the drama" of a story involving a talented musician (that would be Shani Bills) and the people in her orbit.

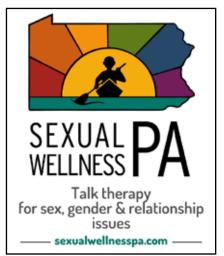
"There is no correct order or area to view the show, as audience members are free to roam the venue at their own pace and interact with performers – once initiated by the performer – while the story unveils itself around them," they said. Guests will also have the



opportunity to take part in a '90s costume contest, with prizes for "most fly threads," jam out to music from the age, and snap – what else – Polaroids with props. Drinks and food, provided by the hosting speakeasy, will be available for purchase. Further, those present get to meet the creative team behind the night and be the first to buy tickets for Tethered's flagship production, which will take place in late September at the Erie Maennerchor building. —Cara Suppa

6 p.m. to 8 p.m. // Room 33, 1033 State St. // \$15 in advance, \$20 at the door // For more information and to purchase tickets, please visit: tickets.eriereader.com Wabtec US Rail, Inc. dba Wabtec Corporation seeks Lead Supplier Quality Engineer in Erie, PA to work closely with Sourcing Leaders to manage and implement supplier/ engineering changes, New Product Introductions (NPIs), and transfers according to Supplier Quality Requirements / Supplier PPAP. Domestic travel required 30% of the time. Telecommuting Permitted.

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#### **2025 Summer Events Preview**

Erie's best season offers music, food, drink, educational, and cultural celebrations

#### **By: Erin Phillips**

Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Do you feel that? That's summer and it's peeking its head around the corner. Summertime in Erie is like our second season – a remedy after those long, grey months of winter. And once those welcomed spring ephemerals fade, we're all ready to usher in the warmth, the undeniable beauty, the sparkling water, the backyard campfires, the stargazing, the Vitamin D hit we've all been missing. Summertime is what makes getting through the winter worth it, and everyone is beyond ready to get out and do some fun stuff in Erie.

#### And boy, do we have some stuff for you to do.

Compiling this list of events is an annual pleasure and always has me looking forward to the lushness of the season – the farmers markets bursting with bounty, the live music drifting through the city air on any given night, local food and beers offered from under a canopy, and the sunsets enjoyed upon warm sand. Below, you will find an eclectic list of events happening in Erie all summer long. We've got the big guns – Celebrate Erie, 8 Great Tuesdays, Tall Ships and the like. But we've also got some smaller, more low key vibes like regular craft vendor markets, niche educational events, and plenty of opportunities to get you out and moving in our beautiful natural environment. So here's to summer, Erie. May we all savor these few fleeting months!

#### Find Your Vibe: Local and Regional Live Music Events

#### **Edinboro Art and Music Festival**

May 16 - 18 // Various locations in downtown Edinboro // Free // edinboroartandmusic.com

Always up first on the summertime docket, the Edinboro Art and Music Festival has been ringing in the season of live, outdoor music for the past 20 years and counting. Spend a day or weekend in downtown Edinboro visiting multiple venues hosting a wide array of performances.

#### Monday Music in the Woods

Mondays, June 2 - July 28, 6 to 8 p.m. // Celebration Garden, 4105 Asbury Rd. // Free // asburywoods.org

Stop by the familiar but always awe-inspiring Asbury Woods on Monday evenings through July and catch your favorite local act – featuring original songwriters alongside fan-favorite cover bands.

## Goodell Gardens and Homestead Summer Music Series

Select Fridays, June 6 - Aug. 29, 7 to 9 p.m. // Goodell Gardens and Homestead, 220 Waterford St., Edinboro // Free // goodellgardens.com

Spend an evening among the fireflies on the lawn of the historic Goodell Gardens and Homestead for their Summer Music Series, featuring laidback tunes in the countryside. Bring your own blanket or lawn chair and enjoy a beautiful summer night of free performances.

#### 14th Fest with EMTA

#### June 12, 6 to 10 p.m. // 14th Street between French and Holland // Free // ride-the-e.com

A block party in the truest sense of the word, the EMTA shuts down 14th Street for their fourth annual 14th Fest featuring local music, food, and brews, with some great neighborhood vibes.

#### Gazebo Concerts in the Park

June 19, July 17, and Aug. 21, 7 to 9 p.m. // Beute Park, Iroquois Ave. // Free // lawrenceparktwp.org Enjoy the quaint Main Street feeling of an old fashioned gazebo park as you take in the sounds of local, family-friendly, singalong music.

#### **UPMC Sunset Music Series**

Wednesdays, June 18 - July 23, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. // Free // Beach 11, Presque Isle State Park // discoverpi.com

A favorite among Erieites and visitors alike, there is no better venue than Erie's most stunning natural resource. Enjoy a night on the beach with live, local music Wednesdays through July.

#### **Chautauqua Institution Summer Music Series**

Select dates throughout the summer with concerts beginning Saturday, June 21 // Chautauqua Amphitheater, 31 Roberts Ave., Chautauqua, N.Y. // chq.org

The Chautauqua Institution continues its 150 year legacy of bringing impressive talent to our region and their Summer Series this year is stacked with nationally touring music and comedy acts like Counting Crows, Guster, the Mountain Goats, The Avett Brothers, Los Lobos, Lewis Black, and Roy Wood Jr. Take advantage of this great cultural resource just 45 minutes away.

#### The Hootenanny 2025

June 27 - June 29 // Wattsburg Fairgrounds, 13998 Rt. 8 // \$20 presale, \$25 at the venue (for the whole weekend) // facebook.com/thehootenanyfestival

A DIY music festival that has been running for years, the Hootenanny is back in 2025 and bigger than ever. A multi-genre local show featuring bands that lean on the heavier side like Odd Atrocity, Mala Sangre, and Grim Grin, promoters encourage you to camp out, hang out, and enjoy a weekend of local music raising funding for the ANNA Shelter.

#### **Erie Downtown Summer Concert Series**

July 3 - Aug. 28, 6 to 9 p.m. // Perry Square, 601 State St. // Free // eriedowntown.com

The Erie Downtown Partnership is bringing back their



Jimmy Eat World plays the main stage at Celebrate Erie 2024.



#### North East Wine Fest

popular free weekly Summer Concert Series happening Thursday nights throughout the summer and featuring local bands like Ray & the County Kind, Savage Daughter, Polka in the Park, and more.

#### **Great Blue Heron**

July 4 - 6 // The Heron Farm and Event Center, 2361 Waits Corners Rd., Sherman, N.Y. // greatblueheron.com

Great Blue Heron is back again in 2025, celebrating over 30 years of music in Sherman, N.Y. Beginning in the '90s by featuring Americana and old-timey mountain music, their lineup has grown to include the genres of funk, jam, soul, roots-rock, reggae, Celtic, afrobeat, zydeco and more. Go for one day or stay for the weekend with on-site camping available – featuring 35 artists on three stages.

#### WQLN Sounds Around Town

Fridays, July 11 - Aug. 1, 7:30 p.m. // Outdoors, adjacent to the WQLN Studios, 8425 Peach St. (indoors in inclement weather) // Free // wqln.org

Tucked away in a clandestine copse adjacent to the WQLN studios, Sounds Around Town is a unique, free concert experience. Bring your lawn chairs, blankets, and snacks, and enjoy! The performances are all recorded by the WQLN crew and later broadcast on their station.

#### **8 Great Tuesdays**

Tuesdays in July and August, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. // Highmark Amphitheater at Liberty Park, 828 W. Bayfront Pkwy // Free // porterie.org/8greattuesdays

Winner of 2024's Best of Erie's Best Music Series category, 8 Great Tuesdays is back and ready to rock Liberty Park. With local headliners like the Erie All Stars, Smilo & the Ghost, and New Wave Nation alongside touring acts like Taj Farrant, The Lao Tizer Band, and Cory Marks – nothing says summer like 8 Great!

#### The 45th Annual Gathering at Chaffee's

July 25 - 26 // 8296 Mill St., Girard // thegatheringatchaffees. com

The fact that folks have been gathering at Chaffee's for 45 years is a testament to the vibes that this yearly festival brings. With jam bands alongside jazz acts, folk songwriters, rock, hip-hop, and trance, camping, food, and always a little bit of mud – if you haven't yet, be sure to make their 45th year your first!

#### **Erie's Blues and Jazz Festival**

Aug. 2 - 3 // Frontier Park, Bayfront Parkway & W. 8th Streets // Free // eriebluesandjazz.com

Hitting their stride again after a brief hiatus two years ago, the Erie Blues and Jazz Festival is continuing their 30+ year-long mission to promote blues and jazz music and to bring locals and visitors together to enjoy an art-filled, peaceful weekend spent amidst free creative entertainment with family and friends.

#### **Celebrate Erie**

Aug. 15 - 17 // Downtown Erie // Free // celebrateerie.com

Consistent Best of Erie winner for Best Festival, it always feels good to Celebrate Erie. With family friendly music (featuring a multitude of local acts alongside nationally touring mainstage performances) dance, food, art activities, the always-anticipated chalk walk, local vendors, and organizations all interspersed within different districts throughout downtown – Celebrate Erie gives everyone a chance



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#### FEATURE



Erie Pridefest: Pride on the Bay and Parade

to show love for our beautiful city. Stay tuned for this year's lineup.

#### Homegrown Harvest Festival

Sunday, Sept. 21 // Goodell Gardens & Homestead, 221 Waterford St., Edinboro // Free // goodellgardens.org

Welcoming the harvest season at Goodell Gardens and Homestead is always a great way to say farewell to summer. With live music, auctions, kids activities, food trucks, art, and local farm products - it's at once a market and concert, and a lovely way to spend a day.

#### **Our West Bayfront Porchfest**

Saturday, Sept. 27 // Various locations throughout the West Bayfront neighborhood // Free // ourwestbayfront.org If you haven't yet experienced Our West Bayfront's annual Porch Fest, make sure you put it on your calendar this year. This neighborhood music festival is one of the most unique events in Erie, featuring various local musical acts of all shapes, sizes, and genres performing on the literal porches of homes and businesses throughout the West Bayfront. With trolley service and food and beverage vendors available, it is also a walkable or bikeable event, and an enjoyable way to spend the day in a beautiful, historic Erie neighborhood.

#### **Raise a Glass for Local Food and Drink Events**

#### Beer Coaster 2025

Saturday, May 17, 4 to 7 p.m. // Waldameer Park and Water World, 220 Peninsula Dr. // lakeeriealetrail.com Celebrate American Craft Beer Week by sampling local brews while riding Waldameer's roller coasters. What a way to kick off the summer season!

#### Erie Ale Works 0.01K

May 23 // 5 p.m. // Erie Ale Works, 416 W. 12th St. // \$10 // eriealeworks.com

If your athletic style is more "pushing your body to the brewery," rather than the limit, then the Erie Ale Works 0.01K is for you. A spoof on a charity 5K, Erie Ale Works encourages you to make your way across 0.01 miles (about 38 feet) of their parking lot, in any fashion you see fit, all to help raise money for the Erie Humane Society.

#### **Erie's Wild Rib Cook Off and Music Festival**

May 28 - 31, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. // Perry Square, 601 State St. // Free // erieribfest.com

Get your rib on at Erie's annual kick off to the summer food scene – Erie's Wild Rib Cook Off. Enjoy local music and brews alongside award winning ribs and sauces.

#### **Arts and Casks**

June 8, July 13, Aug. 10, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. // Altered State Distillery, 1535 W. 8th St. // alteredstatedistillery.com

If you like your vendor fairs with a side of whiskey, Altered State has the event for you! The Best of Erie 2024 winner for best distillery is known for their creative, delicious cocktails and live music - now they're adding vendors to the schedule. Think brunch, bottle sales, cocktails, and tastings all day, with some live music and tons of arts and crafts.

#### Beer on the Bay

Saturday, July 26, noon to 7 p.m. // Liberty Park and Highmark Amphitheater, 828 W. Bayfront Pkwy. // eriebrewingco.com A beautiful day on the bay made better by a bunch of local beers! Sample the suds of a wide variety of local and regional brewers while enjoying the sunshine sparkling on the water.

#### America's Grape Country Craft Beverage Festival

Aug. 1 - 3 // Chautauqua County Fairgrounds, Dunkirk, N.Y. // agcfestival.com

Take a drive to our neighbors to the east and enjoy wine country in New York state. The annual gathering features local wine makers along with craft breweries and distilleries, food trucks and vendors, food and drink demonstrations, local crafters and artisans, and on-site camping. Immerse yourself with local grape (agri)culture for the weekend.

#### North East Wine Fest

Sept. 26 - 28 // Gibson Park, Lake and Main Streets, North East // nechamber.org

What better place to taste over 100 varieties of wine than in North East, Erie County's grape-growing, wine-making capital? Enjoy tasting the many varieties of reds, whites, roses, champagnes, ice wines, and more while you peruse the various vendors and enjoy the early autumn atmosphere.

#### **Community Events to Exercise Your Brain and Body**

#### Lagoon by Pontoon

Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, May 23 - Sept. 7 // Pontoon Boat Station, Presque Isle State Park // Free // events.dcnr. pa.aov

Take a free, educational pontoon boat ride through Misery Bay and the lagoons of Presque Isle with the staff of the PA-DCNR this summer. See and learn about the plants and animals that live in our local wetland habitats, and discover more about the local history and natural resources of Presque Isle.

#### Sunrise Yoga at Dobbins Landing

Wednesdays beginning June 4 at 6 a.m. // Dobbins Landing, 1 State St. // Free // eriedowntown.com

Join instructor Chelsea McQuaid at the literal crack of dawn for an eye-opening, fresh start to your Wednesdays, all summer long. There's no way to have a bad day when you start it with a sun salutation as it rises.

#### **Presque Isle Poker Paddle**

Saturday, June 7 // Presque Isle State Park, 301 Peninsula Dr. // discoverni.com

Love poker? Love kayaking, canoeing, or dinghy-ing? Paddle your way through a full hand of poker within the lagoons at Presque Isle to collect cards, making the best poker hand you can, all while benefiting our gem of a state park. Prizes are available for the best and worst hands!

#### HistErie Week at the Erie County Public Library

June 9 -15 // Various locations throughout Erie // eriecounty-pa.libguides.com/histerie/events

Take a walking tour through a historic neighborhood, a class on how to properly clean gravestones, a talk about maritime history in Erie, a bicycle ride architectural tour, and more with the return of HistErie week hosted by the Erie County Public Library. Celebrate a week of local history-related events and learn some-

#### MONDAY

WHITE BUFFALO S3.00 BUSCH LIGHT ALUMINUM BOTTLES 75 WINGS

IRISH COUSINS

ODIS 12 s3.00 BUSCH LIGHT 70 BONELESS DRAFTS 70 WINGS

## TUESDAY

PHILLY THE ROCKS S2.50 BUSCH LIGHT ST WINGS 1202. BOTTLES

COACH'S BAR & GRILL \$2.50 BUSCH LIGHT BOGO 1202. BOTTLES WINGS

## WEDNESDAY

UGLY TUNA \$3.50 BUSCH LIGHT \$1 BONELESS 1202. BOTTLES \$1 PM-9PM

ROSCO'S \$3.00 BUSCH LIGHT 60 WINGS DRAFTS

EASTERIE MOOSE ST.85 BUSCH LIGHT 65 WINGS

MCKEAN TAVERN s3.50 BUSCH LIGHT 2202, DRAFTS 60 WINGS \$1 WINGS

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#### WEDNESDAY

RESERVOIR 26 S2.50 BUSCH LIGHT STRADITIONAL T202. BOTTLES STRADITIONAL

DOC HOLLIDAYS S3.50 BUSCH LIGHT 75 WINGS 1202. BOTTLES 75 MINGS

THE LIBRARY \$2.0 BUSCH LIGHT 80 WINGS 120Z. CANS

THE CAB \$3.00 BUSCH LIGHT 75 WINGS ALUMINUM BOTTLES 75 ALL DAY

FAT WILLIES \$2.00 BUSCH LIGHT 1202. BOTTLES \$6.95 AN ORDER OF BONELESS WINGS

#### THURSDAY

CHICO'S S3.50 BUSCH LIGHT \$1325 10 WINGS 1202. BOTTLES \$1325 10 WINGS

#### THURSDAY

BRUCE'S PUB & GRUB \$2.50 BUSCH LIGHT \$10 B WINGS ALLMINUM BOTTLES

BUSCH LIGHT S3.001202 BOTTLES S2.000 CANS

DARCY'S PUB & GRUB S2.50 BUSCH LIGHT ALUMINUM BOTTLES \$10 8 WINGS ALU DAY

RED FOX INN \$2.00 BUSCH LIGHT \$12 WINGS DRAFTS

S3.00 BUSCH LIGHT 75 WINGS

CORNERSTONE \$3.00 BUSCH LIGHT ALUMINUM BOTTLES \$10 WINGS XIL DAY \$8.00 AN ORDER OF BONELESS WINGS

TAMARACK TAVERN

CHIPPERS \$2.00 BUSCH LIGHT \$1195 10 WINGS 1202. BOTTLES

SATURDAY

THE CAB \$3.00 BUSCH LIGHT 75 WINGS ALUMINUM BOTTLES 75 ALL DAY

HAGGERTY'S \$2.25 BUSCH LIGHT HALF-OFF 1202. BOTTLES WINGS

#### SUNDAY

GREENGARDEN LANES

HOSECOMPANY#27 S2.00 BUSCH LIGHT 69 WINGS 1202. BOTTLES 69 ALL DAY

#### **MON-FRI**

AJ BAYVIEW \$3.50 BUSCH LIGHT 16oz. ALUMINUM BOTTLES 4:00PM-6:00PM



\$3.00 BUSCH LIGHT | 10 WINGS BOTTLES \$1099

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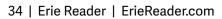


STREAM NOW



COMING THIS MAY ON WQLN PBS







thing about the town we call home.

#### Kids Yoga Series at Goodell Gardens and Homestead

Wednesdays, June 11-28 or July 9-23 // Goodell Gardens and Homestead, 221 Waterford St., Edinboro // tickets.eriereader. com

Help those kiddos (ages three to 10) get in touch with their inner zen with a new series of yoga classes catered to them. Kids will learn calming breathing techniques, meditation, basic yoga poses, and deep relaxation through age-appropriate games, stories, songs, props, and crafts.

#### West Bayfit

Wednesdays from June 11 - July 30, with Farmers Markets continuing through Aug. 20 // Bayview Park, 598 W. 2nd St. // Free // ourwestbayfront.org

Spend a summer evening in Erie's hidden gem of a public park at Bayview for the weekly West Bayfit events hosted by Our West Bayfront. With farmers market produce, kids physical challenges, crafts, and more – come for the fitness and fun, stay for the splash pad.

#### **Erie's Juneteenth Celebration**

Saturday, June 14, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. // Perry Square, 601 State St. // Free

A local celebration of Juneteenth, celebrating America's second Independence Day featuring speakers, vendors, artisans, music, food, and celebration. Additionally, a Juneteenth community meal will be served on Thursday, June 19 from 6 to 9 p.m., also in Perry Square.

#### Movie Mondays in the Square

Select Mondays, June 16 - Aug. 25 (weather permitting) // Begins at dusk // Perry Square, 601 State St. // Free // eriedowntown.com

Create lasting memories with these free, family-friendly movies in Perry Square happening on select Mondays through the summer. Highlights this year include *The Goonies, Moana*, and *Wicked*.

#### World Refugee Day

Thursday, June 26, 6 to 9 p.m. // Perry Square, 601 State St. // Free

Erie honors our rich refugee population, folks who have found safety in Erie and have made it their home – World Refugee Day recognizes the multitude of heritages that make up our city's cultural landscape. With performances, dances, art, vendors, and food.

#### Erie Art Museum Gallery Night

June 27 and Sept. 19 // Multiple galleries throughout region // Free // erieartmuseum.org

Happening four times each year and twice during the summer, Erie Art Museum's Gallery Night offers local art fans and patrons the perfect opportunity to visit a number of local galleries in the same night – with special shows, food and drink, and lots of live music throughout the community – think of it like a pub crawl but with art!

#### Erie Pridefest: Pride on the Bay

Saturday, June 28 // Noon to 6 p.m. // Liberty Park, 828 W.

#### Bayfront Pkwy. // Free // nwpapride.org

This year's celebration will mark the second annual Pride on the Bay at Liberty Park which will allow ample safe space for participants. With vendors, entertainment, and more, the regular Pride Parade will take place the following day, Sunday, June 29 at 1 p.m. on State Street from 11th to Perry Square.

#### **Erie Roller Derby Doubleheaders**

Saturdays, June 28, Aug. 30, and Sept. 20 // Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier // \$10 // tickets.eriereader.com Come watch the competitive, athletic, super-tough, Erie Roller Derby players in one of three doubleheaders they're hosting this summer. Two bruising bouts in one go promises to be an action-packed, kick-ass day on the bay.

#### **Lights Over Lake Erie**

Thursday, July 3 // Dobbins Landing, 1 State St. // cityof.erie. pa.us/lightsoverlakeerie

The city's annual Fourth of July celebration features a fireworks display over the bay. Find your vantage point anywhere along the East or West sides of the bluff on Erie's waterfront or on Presque Isle, for a free, unobstructed view of the works.

#### **Discover Presque Isle**

July 21 - 27 // Presque Isle State Park, 301 Peninsula Dr. // Free // discoverpi.com

Even if you've lived here your whole life, I'd wager a guess that you'll learn something new at Discover Presque Isle. An annual weeklong celebration of our defining natural resource, you'll find food, crafts, vendors, kids activities, lessons, guided tours, birdwatching, live music, and more.

#### Lake Erie Cyclefest

July 24 - 27 // Various locations throughout Erie County // eriesportscommission.com

The annual Cyclefest, brought to Erie through the Erie Sports Commission, is a celebration of all things cycling. If you're more of a casual, around-town cyclist, join in the family-friendly Downtown Slow Roll or the Presque Isle Sunrise Ride. If you're ready to tap into your inner Lance Armstrong, check out the Tour de West County or the Grape Escape Rides (that rolls you up to 50 miles throughout the county).

#### **Presque Isle Triathlon**

Aug. 2 // 7:30 a.m. // Presque Isle State Park, 301 Peninsula Dr. // discoverpi.com

An annual fundraiser for the Presque Isle Partnership, this tri features a 13-mile bike race around Presque Isle, a 3.1-mile run, and a 0.35-mile swim. See all that our state park has to offer, while physically challenging yourself, and raising some much needed funds.

#### National Night Out

Tuesday, Aug. 5 // Various public parks throughout Erie // Free // unitedwayerie.org

National Night Out is sponsored... ahem... nationally by the United Way as an opportunity to get folks out and enjoying their neighborhoods. These free events range from block parties, parades, cookouts, or total takeovers of local parks with live music, food, fun, activities, bounce houses, safety demonstrations, and more.

#### Lucille Ball Comedy Festival

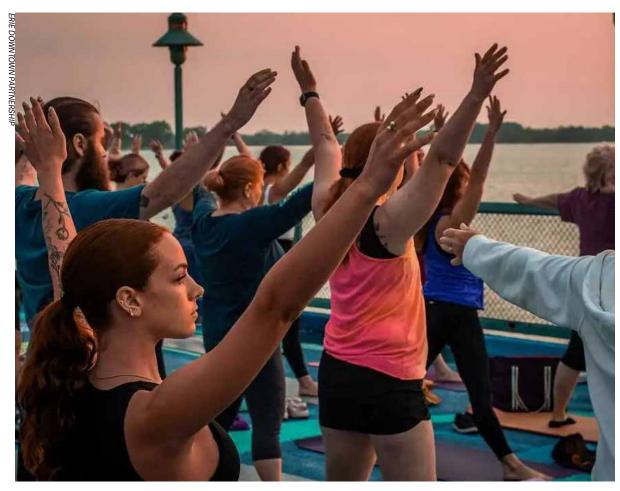
Aug. 7 - 10 // National Comedy Center, 203 W. 2nd St., Jamestown, N.Y. // comedycenter.org

A short drive east to the National Comedy Center in



Pay What You Can Farm Stand, Perry Square

#### FEATURE



#### Sunrise Yoga at Dobbins Landing

Jamestown (the birthplace of the Lucy we love) offers a full week of comedy performances which has given many rising stars their start through the years. The week also includes talks, discussions, panels, and kids activities. Headlining this year's festival are jaw-dropping headliners Jon Stewart and Bill Murray. No joke! You won't want to miss it!

#### Tall Ships Festival 2025

Aug. 21 - 24 // Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier // tallshipserie.org

The tall ships return to Erie's harbor this summer for a spectacular parade of historic vessels from around the world, including Erie's own *Lettie G. Howard*, as they convene for a few days in our bay. Experience deck tours, day sails, food and drink vendors, kids activities, live music, and lectures and discussions.

#### The FINAL Barber Beast on the Bay

Sept. 6 // Presque Isle State Park, 301 Peninsula Dr. // barberbeast.org

The Barber Beast on the Bay has won Best of Erie's Favorite Athletic Competition for 11 years running and this year will mark their FINAL event. Don't miss out on your chance to beat the beast in this *American Ninja Warrior*-style competition before it goes away, and raise some much needed funding for the Barber National Institute while you're at it.

#### **COMICON Erie**

Sept. 12 - 14 // Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier // eriepromotions.com

Comics, Lego, cosplay, RPGs, world-famous comic artists, celebrity speakers, and demonstrations: you've basically died and gone to nerd heaven! In addition to the comic books, and in partnership with BrickErie, attendees can get hands-on by building, discussing, and marveling at all things Lego.

#### Lake Erie Lit Fest

Sept. 13 // Frontier Park, 1501 W. 6th St. // Free // erieartcompany.org

The folks from Werner Books and Coffee (Best of Erie 2024's winners for Best Bookstore, Business, and New Business) have teamed up with the Erie Art Company to bring Lake Erie Lit Fest to Frontier Park. A day full of celebrating the written word, expect local book signings and vendors, readings, kids literacy activities, giveaways, and more!

#### Fresh Community Sustainability: Farmers Markets

#### North East Gibson Park Open Market

Saturdays from June 7 - Sept. 6 (excluding July 12) // 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. // Gibson Park, Lake and Main Streets, North East // nechamber.org

#### Bayview Park Farmer's Market

Wednesdays, June 11 - Aug. 20 // 6 to 8 p.m. // Bayview Park, 598 W. 2nd St. // ourwestbayfront.org

#### LEAF Open Market

Biweekly on Saturdays, June 14 - Sept. 20 // 8th Street side of

Frontier Park // leaferie.org/openmarket

#### Sisters of St. Joseph Little Italy Farmer's Market

Mondays, June 23 through Sept. 22 // 3 to 6 p.m. // 331 W. 18th St. // ssjnn.org

#### Pay What You Can Farm Stands

Weekly from July 7 through early October // builderie.org/ hope/pwyc

The idea behind these farmers market stands is to provide fresh produce to those most in need. The farmers involved ask that patrons take only what is needed and any funds raised through the sale of their wares helps to ensure produce is available throughout the season.

The locations and times of these markets vary: Mondays from 4 to 6 p.m. // 130 Meadville St., Edinboro Tuesdays from noon to 2 p.m. // 15th and Parade streets Wednesdays from 4 to 6 p.m. // ECAT, 650 East Ave. and Strong Vincent, 1330 W. 8th St.

Thursdays from 4 to 6 p.m. // 2304 Parade St. Fridays from noon to 2 p.m. // 310 E. 4th St. Fridays from 4 to 6 p.m. // Perry Square, 601 State St.

#### Get Your Vend On: Recurring Summer Vendor Markets

#### **Boutique Nights**

Fridays, June 13, July 11, and Aug. 8 // 5 to 8 p.m. // The Shops at 5th and State, 501 State St. // flagshipcitydistrict.com Boutique Nights offer a great opportunity to get out and shop local. The small businesses on and adjacent to the Shops at 5th and State open their doors hosting special sales events, live art demonstrations, food and drinks, and live music on a clandestine patio tucked between buildings. It's like avant garde shopping – get into it.

#### Market on the Top Floor

June 21-22 // PACA, 1505 State St. // Free // paca1050.org Part of PACA's ongoing "Rise with PACA" fundraising campaign, the performing artist collective is hosting its inaugural Market on the Top Floor which is a summertime vendors market featuring handmade goods, boutiques, crafters and artisans, baked goods and more, all to support the ongoing work of PACA.

#### Grounded Print Shop Vendor Market

June 21, July 19, and Aug. 30 // 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. // Grounded Print and Paper Shop, 1902 Cherry St. // groundedprintshop.com The creative vibe at Grounded Print Shop and their ample space makes the perfect setting for Erie's most eclectic vendor market. Stop by to shop, to see the art and space, sign up for a yoga class, and grab some one-of-a-kind, locally-made goods.

#### **Copper Carriage Markets**

Spring, summer, fall, and winter // 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. // Copper Carriage and surrounding block, 406 State St. // coppercarriage.com

Each season, the folks at Copper Carriage (voted Best of Erie's favorite antique shop in 2024) spread out a bit and host an open air flea market featuring crafters and antiquers alike selling their wares along

#### FEATURE



St. Paul's Italian Festival

their corner of State Street. You'll never know what treasures you'll find!

#### **Erie's Rich Tapestry: Annual Heritage Festivals**

#### 15th Annual Troika Festival (Russian Orthodox Church)

May 23 - 25 // Friday, 4 to 9 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, noon - 6 p.m. // Church of the Nativity Community Center, 109 German St. // churchofthenativity.net

#### 77th Annual North East Firemen's Cherry Festival (North East's Agricultural Heritage)

July 9 - 12 // Wednesday through Friday, 5:30 to 11 p.m., Saturday, 7:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. // 40 N. Lake St., North East // necherryfestival.org

#### 37th Annual Panegyri Greek Festival

July 11 - 12 // 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. // Assumption Greek Orthodox Church, 4376 W. Lake Rd. // eriegreekorthodox.org

#### 52nd Annual Waterford Heritage Days

July 18 - 20 // Gazebo Park, Waterford // facebook.com/waterforddays

The AmeriMasala (Multi-cultural Arts Event)

Saturday, July 19 // 11 a.m. // Perry Square, 601 State St. // facebook.com/The-AmeriMasala

#### 60th Annual Dan Rice Days (Girard History and Heritage)

July 31 - Aug. 2 // Downtown Girard, 34 Main St. W // danricedays.com

#### St. Paul's Italian Festival

Aug. 8 - 10 // St. Paul Parish, 1617 Walnut St. // stpaulrcerie.org

#### Zabawa Polish Festival

Aug. 22 - 24 // Holy Trinity Catholic Church, 2220 Reed St. // holytrinityrc.org

#### 29th Annual German Heritage Festival

Aug. 30 - 31 // Saturday, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. // St. Nick's Grove, 5131 Old French Rd. // dank-erie.org

#### **Erie Irish Festival**

Sept. 2025 (exact dates and times TBA) // St. Patrick's Church, 130 E. 4th St. // erieirishfestival.com

#### **County Fairs**

**97th Annual Cochranton Community Fair** Aug. 4 - 9 // cochrantonfair.org

**94th Annual Warren County Fair** Aug. 4 - 9 // warrencountyfair.net

78th Annual Crawford County Fair Aug. 16 - 23 // crawfordcountyfairpa.com

**140th Annual Erie County Fair** Aug. 24 - 30 // wattsburgfair.com

#### 103rd Annual Spartansburg Community Fair

Aug. 30 - Sept. 4 // spartansburgcommunityfair.com

88th Annual Waterford Community Fair Sept. 1 - 6 // waterfordfair.org

**80th Annual Albion Area Fair** Sept. 9 - 13 // albionfair.com

Erin Phillips can be found patronizing any number of these events all summer long and is particularly anticipating HistErie Week, Farmers Markets, and Celebrate Erie. She can be reached at erin@eriereader.com





#### **ALBUM REVIEWS**



Black Country, New Road Forever Howlong

#### \*\*\*\*

Ninja Tune

A fter a studio hiatus, this Cambridge collective sounds renewed on *Forever Howlong*. Black Country, New Road (BCNR), is one of the most notable acts to break out in the 2020s rock scene. Their 2021 full-length debut expanded their reach beyond niche circles, and the 2022 follow-up *Ants From Up There* is widely considered one of the decade's best albums. However, mere days before its release, frontman Isaac Wood announced his departure due to mental health struggles, leaving the band without a lead voice at their peak of popularity. Still, they pressed on, debuting new material, much of which appeared on their 2023 live album. Jumpcut to 2025 as BCNR releases *Forever Howlong*, the band's first studio material since Wood's withdrawal from the band. However, this rendition of the group sounds considerably different from what came before. First evident in their live album is the band's newfound appreciation for the baroque. While string and brass have always been in the BCNR canon, *Forever Howlong* leans more heavily into the orchestral. This choice creates a level of depth not previously seen in the band's output. Songs like "Two Horses" and "Nancy Tries to Take the Night" paint these fantastical vistas of worlds long since gone, their instruments playing characters inside these microcosms. While a massive departure from the prog and punk sounds from their prior works, BCNR has found its footing on a new rock. —Nathaniel Clark

# 

#### Deafheaven

Lonely People with Power Roadrunner Records



t seemed like Deafheaven was on the verge of switching lanes. 2021's *Infinite Granite* saw the band dropping their lengthy black metal movements in favor of short, accessible shoegaze songs. It wouldn't have been a bad trade-off if the songs were a bit more compelling. After a polarizing response, returning to black metal on *Lonely People with Power* could seem like a regression. Instead, the band carries forward lessons from each past release, crafting what feels like a career-defining achievement. *Lonely People with Power* isn't *Sunbather Part 2*, though a track like "Winona" invites comparison. Elements from across the band's catalog appear here: the thrash-metal energy of single "Magnolia," refined bursts of clean vocals on "Heathens" and "The Marvelous Orange Tree." But there are also fresh directions, such as the gritty post-punk of "Body Behavior" and the harsh noise of "Incidental II." While many imitators have come and gone since Deafheaven's rise, *Lonely People with Power* continues to capture their past strengths while pushing boldly forward. It's a record only these genre-bending veterans could make – and it may be their best yet. —Aaron Mook



#### Japanese Breakfast

For Melancholy Brunettes (& Sad Women) Dead Oceans

#### \*\*\*\*

For someone as talented as Michelle Zauner, the songwriter behind Japanese Breakfast, it can be hard to escape the shadow of your own accomplishments. Zauner took a much-needed break from music after the release of her biggest record yet, *Jubilee*, in June of 2021; in its place, she took to writing, first a book (*Crying in H Mart*) and then a screenplay of the same name. Now, four years later, we're presented with *For Melancholy Brunettes* (& Sad Women), a refreshingly understated follow-up that refuses to bow down to the maximalist pop of its predecessor. *For Melancholy Brunettes* swaps out the electronic synth and chamber-pop of *Jubilee* in favor of acoustic instrumentation, literary references, and a sinister undertone informed by the singer's research into male-dominated subcultures. This can be heard on the Alex G-adjacent single "Mega Circuit" as well as the ominous "Honey Water," a distorted slab of indie-rock songwriting that sounds unlike anything Zauner has released before. But shockingly, the rest of the album is largely composed of lightweight ballads, including a duet with actor Jeff Bridges. It's a strange combination, but a pleasant one, and it's the kind of switch-up that continues to make Zauner such an engrossing songwriter, regardless of the size of her vision. —Aaron Mook



#### **Brian the Fly** Night Light Self-released

\*\*\*\*1

frequently find myself forgetting the word "lucubratory," an adjective whose etymological origins roughly mean "thoughtfully composed by candlelight." At a more entomological present, Brian the Fly's latest full-length album, *Night Light* is a winner in just such a way. Performed and recorded almost entirely by Brian (Kinney) himself, this record is undeniably charming. An exquisitely relaxing mood-setter, these ten tracks are perfect for late nights, hangouts, and study sessions alike. "I had an idea a couple years ago to make an album about the thoughts that keep me up at night, like guilt or insecurities about my past," Kinney explained. That ideation intertwined with the story of the 2009 film *Moon*. "I developed this concept about someone going through the stages of grief while being stranded in space on a ship called *The Diptera* (the scientific name for "fly")." What resulted is a synthy journey perfect for fans of Toro y Moi, Washed Out, or Porches. Kinney's earlier efforts had their roots in hip-hop and lo-fi sounds, while *Night Light* moves into a more indie evolution. A bedroom album of the highest caliber, this is one fly that's worth the buzz. —Nick Warren

#### **Tommy In Tome? Link's Collected Cartoons**

The Reader's very own Tommy Link set to release a book of Tommy In Toon

#### **By: Nick Warren**

"Hey Tommy, random thought, but let me know if you'd ever want to submit cartoons to the Reader." I sent this via Facebook messenger one day in late 2016 to my friend and fellow musician Tommy Link. Fast-forward nearly a decade later and we'll soon have an entire book filled with Link's cartoons (with that very message from yours truly even making it into the intro), titled *Living in the Moment*.

In January of 2017, *Tommy In Toon* debuted in the Erie Reader, appearing right under that issue's music reviews. It was the perfect pairing, with the titular in-comic Tommy being a gigging singer-songwriter, lugging his guitar and amplifier into the very first panel. Link was the second regular local cartoonist at the Reader, with Bryan Toy launching *Just Toyin' Witcha* in 2011. I'm proud to say that we now have five regular cartoonists from the Erie area contributing original strips and panels every issue, not to mention a handful of guest artists.

"I am not a trained visual artist by any extent, but years ago when I started playing shows more regularly, I had a cartoon version of myself that I would draw, just as something to post to help advertise for shows," Link explained. As an up-and-coming solo artist, Link would promote his appearances with his cartoon avatar prior to beginning the strip.

"I had a very signature look that I was trying to establish as a musician," he laughed. With his long hair, bushy beard, green shirt, and (what was originally a costume piece for a scarecrow) a tweed hat that Indiana Jones's father would love, Tommy's look was born.

"Honestly, comic strips were really part of my life well before playing music or anything," Link explained. "My parents have always had a subscription to the Erie Times-News. I read the funnies every day before school and my dad would always give me a hard time being like, 'did you read any news?" he joked.

Along with his personal favorite *Calvin & Hobbes*, Link gravitated to strips that "did have more of a story, where they had consistent characters, where they were telling stories: *Luann*, *Baby Blues*, *Curtis*, *Garfield*, and *Peanuts* (obviously).

There are a few things that make Tommy's cartoons so much fun and evergreen. Firstly, it's his storytelling and visual pacing. From day one, he knew exactly how to set up a joke and land a punchline. Then, it's the specificity of the character in an all-too-familiar environment, which may or may not be a little niche. "Fellow musicians are the ones who have told me that they've been waiting for this work," Link remarked.

There are a few things that make Tommy's cartoons so much fun and evergreen. Firstly, it's his storytelling and visual pacing. From day one, he knew exactly how to set up a joke and land a punchline. Then, it's the specificity of the character [a musician] in an all-toofamiliar environment [the small venue], which may or may not be a little niche.

"There's a lot of people who it resonated with, the ins and outs that you don't think of if you're not a musician."

While there's a fair amount of inside baseball like microphone misophonia (a word Link clued me in on), open mic slot politics, and acoustic guitar physics, that's not everything. If you know the author even a tiny bit, it's easy to see the undeniable heart and sentimentality shining through.

Joined by a cast of recurring characters, Tommy is flanked by the likes of Pete the bartender, Renee the barista, his buddy Brew, his arch-nemesis Kenny LaRoche, and of course, his dear turtle friend, Turtle.

Inspired by his fellow Reader cartoonist Anthony Carson's self-published collection *Can I Change the World with a Doodle?*, Link has brought together his best-loved strips in full color. Some of the earliest illustrations have been redone to sharpen them up a

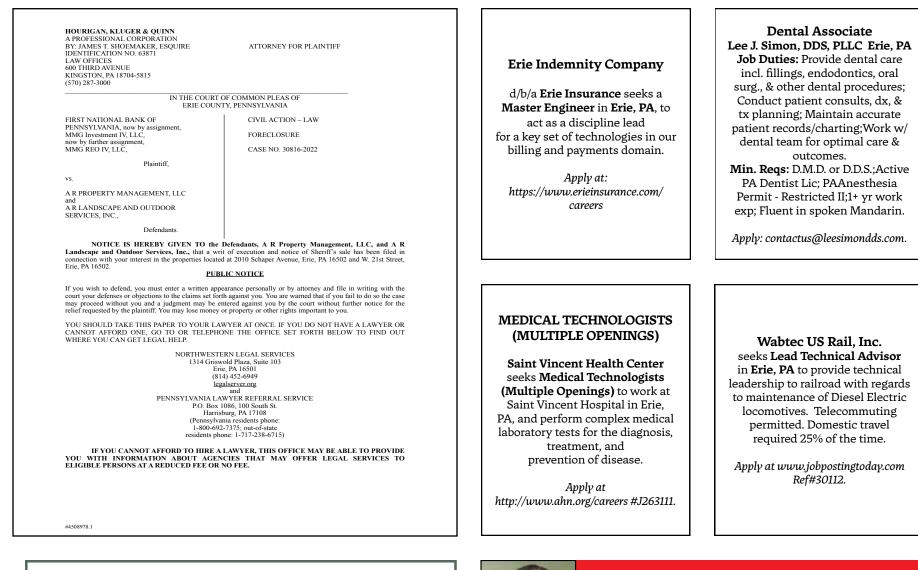


Local musician and long-time Erie Reader comic contributor Tommy Link has compiled all of his monthly Tommy in Toon cartoons into a published book that will be available to purchase in May. Expect all of the great characters you've grown to love through the years and more unpublished work.

bit, and there are plenty of strips that have never been featured in the Reader, as Link updates his Instagram page with a new comic every week.

Produced by Erie's Emerald Printing, the official release date of the *Living in the Moment* is set for May 22. For \$18, it will be available for sale at Pressed Books & Coffee, as well as online at tommyintoon.com and at his Patreon page at patreon.com/TommyinToon. Stay tuned for more details on a special book release party, which will, of course, feature its share of live music.





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#### **MOVIE REVIEWS**

#### A Perfect Game: Eephus is Funny and Bittersweet

Director Carson Lund brilliantly portrays the schlubby side of baseball

#### \*\*\*\*1

The history of "America's Pastime" is as interesting and contradictory as America itself. The sport is loaded with triumph, heartbreak, controversy, corruption, and personalities almost too wild to believe. Above all that though, baseball, more than any other sport, is the sport of working-class schlubs. Carson Lund heavily plays up the schlubby side of baseball with his film *Eephus*, a serio-comic look at the confusing and often absurd rules of baseball that also works as a brilliant look at the intricacies of male bonding and a lament over the loss of "third spaces."

In a small Massachusetts town in the mid-1990s, a lonely baseball field becomes the setting for a game between Adler's Paint and the Riverdogs whose longtime rivalry comes to an end the day before the field is demolished to make way for a new school. As day becomes evening and the innings pile up, this motley crew realizes that they are witnessing the end of an era.

Baseball makes the perfect sport for a hangout movie. Long stretches of boredom punctuated by a few seconds of excitement give us time to just exist with these characters, watching as their game becomes a meetup between old friends and occasionally, an impromptu group therapy session. The result is extremely funny but always with a hint of sadness as these guys don't really want to let go of their hobby but know the game



can't go on forever. It all comes to a bittersweet finale that ends, not with a grand slam, but a balk. *Eephus* is currently playing in select theaters and is also available on Amazon Prime, Apple TV+, Google Play, and You-Tube.—Forest Taylor

Directed by Carson Lund // Written by Michael Basta, Nate Fisher, and Carson Lund // Starring Keith William Richards, Stephen Radochia, Bill "Spaceman" Lee, Ray Hyrb, Cliff Blake, David Pridemore, Keith Poulson, John R. Smith Jr., Pete Minkarah, Wayne Diamond, Theodore Bouloukos, Russell J. Gannon, David Torres Jr., Nate Fisher, Joe Castiglione, and Frederick Wiseman // 98 minutes // Music Box Films // Unrated (R equivalent)

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#### Deliver Us From Evil: Sinners is a Bloody Good Time

Director Ryan Coogler mashes up genres with panache

#### \*\*\*\*

Genre mash-ups are tricky. It takes considerable skill to begin a film as one genre only to drop a second one on the audience halfway through. Fortunately, Ryan Coogler has plenty of talent to make his new film *Sinners* just such an experience. Despite an unnecessary opening scene that spoils a bit of the fun, Coogler never shows his hand before turning his gangster saga into a horror film and the result looks as if *Hoodlum* was thrown in a blender with *Near Dark*. The resulting film is sexy, scary, endlessly entertaining, and with a killer soundtrack to boot.

In Mississippi in 1932, the infamous "Smokestack Twins" (both played by Michael B. Jordan) have returned after years involved with organized crime in Chicago. They plan to leave their life of crime behind and open up a juke joint just outside of their hometown. They buy some land and get together a crew to turn their opening night into an unforgettable party, but unbeknownst to them, an ancient evil has arrived to turn the night into a bloodbath.

Like From Dusk til Dawn and The Descent, the story and characters are so compelling that when the supernatural elements begin seeping in, they threaten to cheapen the rest of the film. But Coogler, like the directors of the aforementioned films, is skilled enough to use them to make a great film even better. The horror in the second half serves to highlight the themes of the



first rather than come out of nowhere. I'm trying hard not to spoil the film as the fun is in the uncovering of the plot, so I'll just end by saying go in blind if possible. —Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Ryan Coogler // Starring Michael B. Jordan, Miles Caton, Hailee Steinfeld, Wunmi Mosaku, Jack O'Connell, Jayme Lawson, Omar Benson Miller, Li Jun Li, Yao, Lola Kirke, Peter Dreimanis, Buddy Guy, and Delroy Lindo // Warner Bros. Pictures // 138 minutes // Rated R





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57. "The Wire" character 58. Tajikistan, for short, once 60. Wondrous feeling 61. Mellow like cheese 63. Food served up for some rock Kings? 67. Tattletale 68. Of the lower back 69. Like some sporting equipment 70. "The Amazing Race" network 71. Photographer Arbus 72. Extremely

#### Down

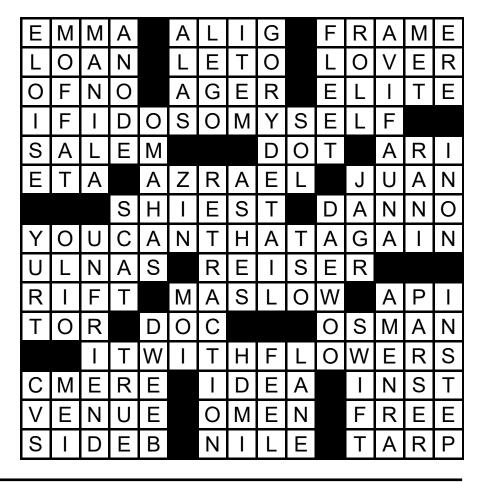
1. All over the web 2. "Jaws" town 3. Cake component 4. Prefix that follows giga, tera, and peta 5. Notion 6. Another nickname for Dubya 7. Sinus doc 8.2010 health legislation, in brief 9. London length 10. Crash, for one 11. The night before 12. Understand 15. "Yertle the Turtle" author 18. Chinese fruit 23. Tokyo's former name 25. Without doing any-

#### thing

27. Household cleaning chemical 28. Johnny of The Smiths and Modest Mouse 29. Giraffe's relative 30. Forget-me-\_\_\_ (certain flowers) 32. "No ifs, \_\_\_\_, or buts" 34. Waimea Bay greeting 35. Group including Wordsworth and Coleridge, based on their location in England 37. "Behold!" to Caesar 39. Hiking trail 40. Word at the end of a French film 41. 1962 John Wayne film set in Africa 42. New Age Irish singer 47. Typing speed acronym 48." means!" 50. Diagnostic image, for short 52. Psychoanalyst Sigmund 54. Increase 55. Deed holder 56. Requiring attention 59. "Yeah, whatever" 61. Part of a circle 62. Talk a lot 64. "Cheerleader" singer of 2015 65. Pelicans' org. 66. Bronco or Equinox, e.g.



#### Answers to last puzzle



# CALENDAR

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Sat 5/24 Palace of Machinery / FEED Works @ 12pm / \$5 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Palace of Machinery / FEED Works @ 5pm / \$5 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Tue 5/27

#### Featured



**Honey Bakery** will lead a class in

sourdough breadmaking at the Yellow House 436 Walnut St., Girard, PA

Sourdough & Spirits at the Yellow House @ 6pm / \$50 Yellow House, 436 Walnut Street, Girard PA, 436 Walnut Street, Girard

#### Fri 5/30 TINYstage

@ 5pm / Free cafeGIANT, 1311 State Street **Candlelight: Tribute to Adele** 

The Masonic Temple of Erie, 32 West 8th Street. fever@

Fri 6/06 Featured



#### 2024 - 2025 THEATRE SEASON

The Price @ 7:30pm / \$20 PACA, 1505 State Street



Sat 6/07

Into the Woods 5 Miler @ 9am / Free-\$35 4105 Asbury Road

GET LOST 5k with Northwest PA K9 Search and Rescue @ 10am / Free-\$25 Harborcreek Community Park Firman Road Erie PA 16510, 5850 Firman Rd

#### Featured



**REWIND: A 90's Themed Immersive** Pop-up @ 6pm / \$15 Room 33, 1033 State Street



#### Featured



Murder Mystery Medvale Mayhem: "Class of '85 Reunion" Murder Mystery Dinner **Theater at Madeline's** @ 6:30pm / \$45-\$55 Madeline's Dining and Events, 8844 Pennsylvania 18, Cranesville



The Price @ 7:30pm / \$20 PACA, 1505 State Street

Calendar information is provided by event organizers. All events are subject to change or cancellation. This publication is not responsible for the accuracy of the information contained in this calendar.

#### Fri 5/09 Palace of Machinery / FEED Works

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

Palace of Machinery / FEED Works @ 5pm / \$5 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

**Brad Ford: Broken Sculpture** @ 5pm / Free cafeGIANT, 1311 State Street

TINYstage @ 5pm / Free cafeGIANT, 1311 State Street

#### Featured



OYS IN THE BAND by Mart Crowley

Boys in the Band @ 7:30pm / \$20 PACA, 1505 State Street



#### Sat 5/10 Featured



Tulips, Teas & Treats! @ 11am / \$55-\$60 Goodell Gardens & Homestead, 221 Waterford Street, Edinboro

Palace of Machinery / FEED Works @ 12pm / \$5 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street





Flight, Crossfire, Sweet Baby Jesus Live at the King's **Rook Club** @ 9pm / \$7 King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street

Featured



STIM CITY : UKGMANIA @ 10pm / \$10 May 10th - May 11th FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Sun 5/11 Boys in the Band

@ 2pm / \$20 PACA, 1505 State Street

Fri 5/16 Brad Ford: Broken Sculpture @ 5pm / Free cafeGIANT, 1311 State Street

Sat 5/17 @ 5pm / Free cafeGIANT, 1311 State Street

Palace of Machinery / FEED Works @ 12pm / \$5 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

## @ 7pm / \$22.66 eventvesta.com

**Brad Ford: Broken Sculpture** 

Thu 5/22