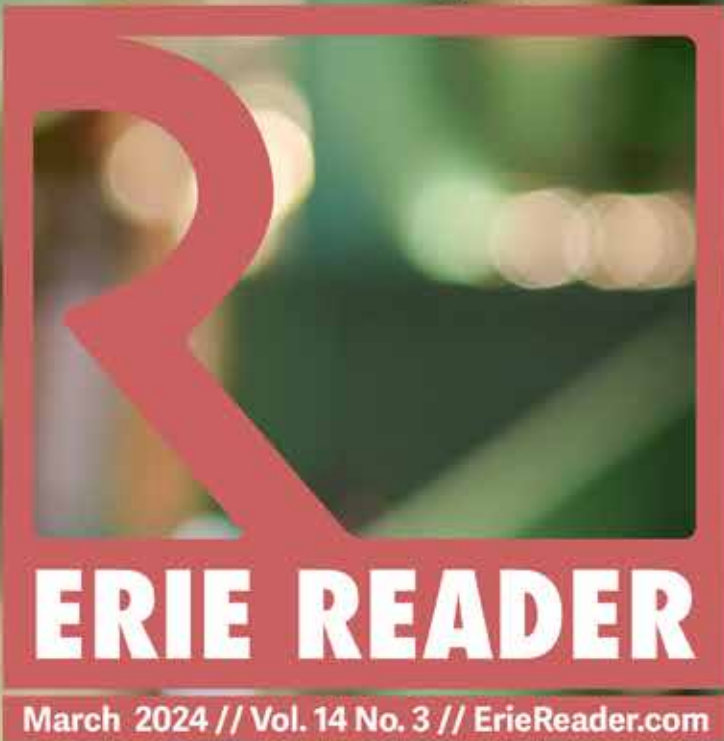


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the **FOOD ISSUE**

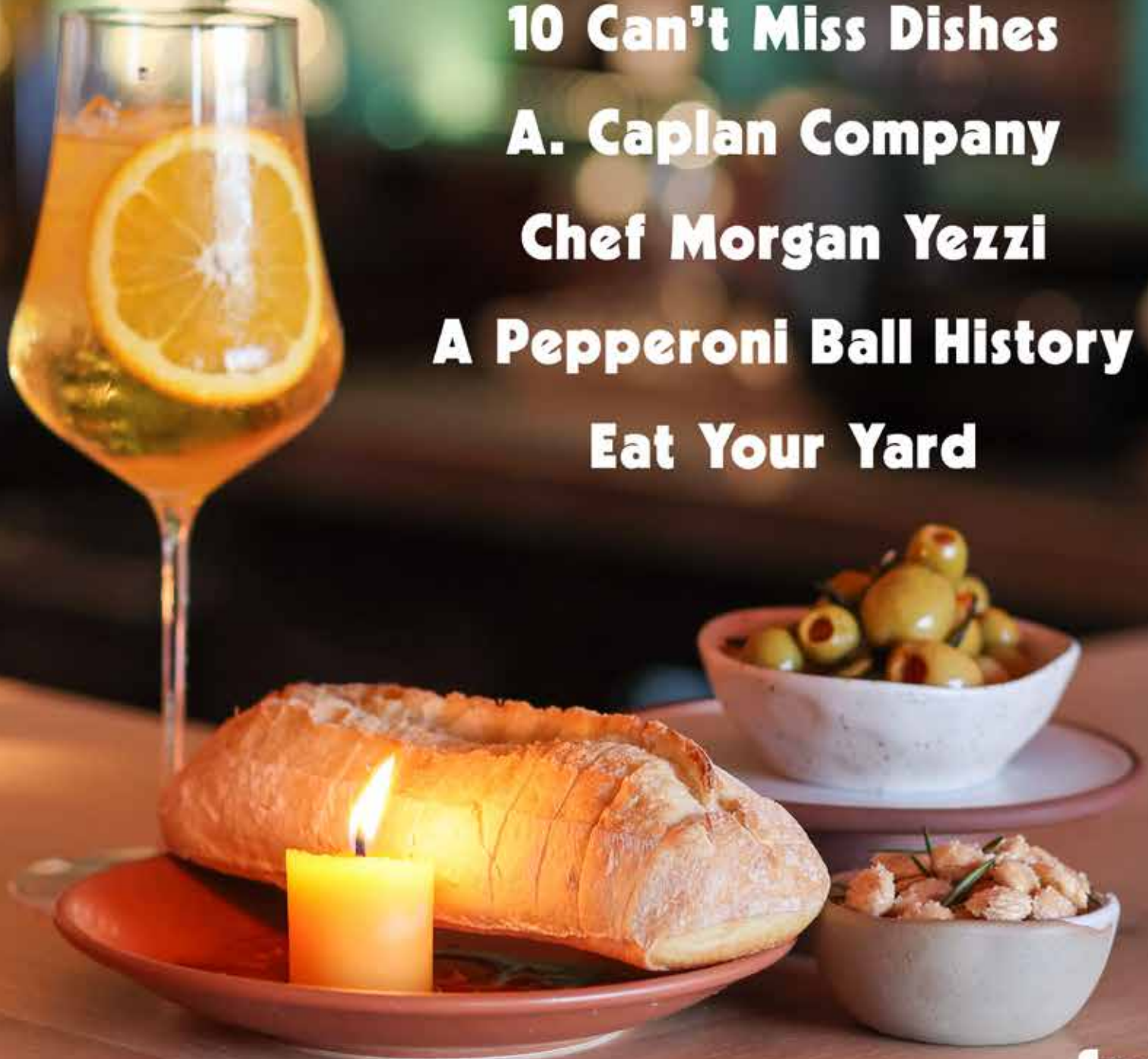
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From the Editors**Baking the bread we break**

A few months ago, this writer embarked on a journey with sourdough bread. I mixed some flour and water together in a jar and watched it rise, and fall, and rise again until it was ready to be made into bread. The time and care involved in sourdough breadmaking leaves plenty of space for contemplation, and as I knead the dough, perform series of stretches and folds, and feed my starter every morning and evening, my thoughts tend to drift towards history.

From the first time human beings cleared land for settled farming some 14,000 years ago, they have been experimenting with breadmaking. Grinding grains into flour, forming flour into dough, and baking dough into bread. In many ways, bread is truly the benchmark of civilization. Thousands of years ago, endless experimentation and failure after failure went into developing many of the recipes we take for granted today — something as simple as a loaf of bread. And this experimentation was relayed through generations within families and tribes from watching, learning, practicing, and honoring the knowledge gained from the experiences of grandparents and parents.

Today, I'm able to follow step-by-step instructions from a book or website, procure all of the baking supplies determined to help make breadmaking as successful as possible like: banneton baskets, bread lames, a kitchen scale, a Dutch oven — all of which are conveniently and readily available at places like A. Caplan Company, featured herein — some human habits really don't change much.

More often than not, chefs and home cooks alike learn methods of cooking from parents, grandparents, or loved ones, carrying on recipes that have been made, through experimentation, over and over for generations and honor their individual ancestral heritages by recreating those recipes for their families today. As you'll read within, Chef Morgan Yezzi feels this connection somewhat more than most, as he has essentially built his life around honoring the recipes of his grandmothers.

Even local delicacies like pepperoni balls have their meager beginnings in kitchens full of experimentation — the creative problem-solving involved in grappling with problems of leftover fish, leftover deli meat, and leftover dough until, generations later, we're all still enjoying (and debating about) the ultimate solution.

All of the items we've chosen this month in our annual Can't Miss Dishes feature call upon some kind of tradition: quite obviously, the simple sourdough bread and saffron butter, as pictured on the cover, but also through traditional Indian, Mexican, Thai, French, Japanese, and Mediterranean dishes that call upon generations of people all over the world, honing their recipes to become the perfect food we're honored to showcase within.

So let's break some bread, shall we?

The State of Local Food Policy

Food access is more political than you may think

By: Susannah Faulkner

Imagine you are taking a stroll around Erie on a beautiful spring day when you pass a park filled with youth playing. If you are in the surrounding county municipalities of the city, you can assume that one out of every seven of those children are hungry. And in the City of Erie, it jumps to one in five. This grim reality of food insecurity for our community only begins to scratch the surface on the state of local food policy.

So, what exactly is food policy? It is the collection of all the government's actions, at the local, state, and federal levels, that shape our food system. This includes everything from farming regulations, trade agreements, nutrition guidelines, food assistance programs, and much more. Since the 1970s, countries across the globe have narrowed the umbrella term of food policy, encompassing health, agriculture, labor, commerce, and welfare, to focus mainly on food security and hunger. Now more than ever, it is critical for us to broaden the scope of food policy to tackle these persistent and pervasive problems.

For me, food policy is also deeply personal. It wasn't until college that I began to embody my role as a food policy advocate. Growing up in Erie in the '90s with severe food allergies and other medically-necessary dietary restrictions was illuminating — demonstrating to me, early on, the disparities that existed within food access and nutrition while sitting in the Harding Elementary School cafeteria. That sense of helplessness stuck with me into adulthood. After organizing to reform my college's dining services and disability policies, I went to work for one of the largest natural food corporations and developed a training program for educational institutions across the country to better accommodate students with similar needs. In many ways, it has always felt that this work chose me.

During graduate school, a Washington Post opinion piece on the need for a national food policy in the U.S. summoned a greater call to action and an opportunity for further research. My thesis asked the question: what makes a successful national food policy around the globe in countries like Scotland, Canada, and Australia, and how can the U.S. learn from these examples to develop a new food governance framework? I presented my research at the 2018 Yale University Food Systems Symposium, on a panel with policy and law professors who were driving the narrative for food policy change.

Through those long stretches of research and writing, it became evident how political food truly is. Often, we see this play out with tit-for-tat fights between Republican and Democratic elected officials over SNAP/food stamp funding. More recently, the battle has turned to free school meals. Governor Shapiro's commitment to providing free school breakfast to all students in Pennsylvania was a huge food policy win last year. The governor remarked that "our chil-



While Pennsylvania's Governor Josh Shapiro recently committed to guarantee free school breakfasts to all school-aged children in the state, 14 Republican-run states opted out of a federal program providing funding for food assistance for lower-income families during the summer break.

dren deserve a safe, healthy learning environment no matter what zip code they live in or how much their parents make" and I believe that every teacher would agree.

The Republican backlash to such expansive food policies is growing every day. Last month, 14 states opted out of a federal program providing food assistance to lower-income families with school-age kids during the summer break. During my brief time on Erie City Council, I learned that we, as elected officials, essentially never turn down "free" money from the state or federal government. Unfortunately — cruelly — it seems 14 state governors are willing to make exceptions.

The roots of this division are long, but many signs point back to the successful organizing during the Civil Rights Era. When the Child Nutrition Act passed in 1966, five national women's groups banded together to promote free meal programs in schools, including the Young Women's Christian Association, National Council for Catholic Women, National Council of Negro Women, Church Women United, and the National Council of Jewish Women (read more about this feat in *School Lunch Politics* by Susan Levine). This framed the national conversation and sparked local, grassroots initiatives to meet the immediate need. The most successful being the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California — they started their free breakfast program in 1969. In two years, they had implemented programs in 36 cities across the country for thousands of children in need. If it wasn't for the efforts of the Black Panther Party, we likely wouldn't see food policy triumphs like Governor Shapiro's universal free breakfast program.

Here in Erie, we are at a critical moment that re-

quires us to collectively shape our future through food policy. With the Erie Food Co-op leaving the downtown area, we are yet again reminded of how challenging healthy food access can be, especially for our neighbors who lack a car, live on a limited income, or have a disability — or who might be facing a combination of these issues. We must create incentives for local grocery stores to open in underserved neighborhoods, addressing food deserts, and increasing access to affordable and healthy food options.

The pandemic taught many of us hard lessons on food purchasing, nutrition, and access. Those hardships haven't ended, and in many ways have increased for local individuals and families in poverty. As Priya Fielding-Singh asserts in her book *How the Other Half Eats*, "no family should have to eat as if they are living through a pandemic that lasts their entire lifetimes." Erie's growing community gardens, soup kitchens, urban agriculture, ethnic markets, and food banks are doing everything they can to serve the hungry. How can we meet the immediate need but also plan for a reimagined future? We are fortunate to have the Erie Food Policy Advisory Council convening spaces to have these conversations and positively change the system.

As you peruse this food issue, ask yourself: how is Erie doing on food policy and what changes can I make to improve it?

The Erie Food Policy Advisory Council can be found at eriefarmersmarkets.org/fpac or by email at ErieFPAC@gmail.com

Susannah Faulkner can be reached at susannah.faulkner@gmail.com



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Can't Miss Dishes 2024

Craveable local fare from our staff and readers

By: Erie Reader Staff

You know your favorites. That dish you always order when you regularly visit your well-loved local spot. That dish where, even though something else on the menu may catch your eye, you just can't seem to *not* order it, because it is just too good to get anything else. *That* is the essence of the Erie Reader's yearly menu of Can't Miss Dishes. These dishes may not be the flashiest items on the menu, they may not be artisanal or tweezered or particularly Instagrammable, but they are *good*. And something we truly wouldn't want you to miss.

Most of the choices for the dishes we included were sourced internally — our writers, staff, and editors chiming in about those local flavors they love. Other suggestions came from social media — friends of the Reader who clued us in on a few dishes of which we weren't previously aware. Our list this year is eclectic: we've got classic American fare, alongside Asian, Mediterranean, Indian, Spanish, and Mexican dishes; we've got vegetarian and vegan dishes alongside fish, chicken, and baked goods, and as always, a little something sweet to finish off the meal. Everyone is sure to find something delicious that they didn't know about before, something that may soon become that must-order-every-time menu item.

Ok! Let's eat!

(Listed alphabetically by location)

What: Chicken Caesar Salad

Where: Bricks American Steakhouse, 417 State St.

Vibe: Perfectly executed staple

On the menu as: Classic Caesar (add on: Grilled Chicken)

Price: \$22



This is the absolute definition of why we do Can't Miss Dishes each year. Who would think that a chicken caesar salad would be something so craveable that it would send our media editor Jessica Hunter back to Bricks for lunch again and again? Bricks might be known (and rightfully so) for their intensely flavorful aged steaks, sky-high burgers, and massive tomahawk pork chops — but if you're feeling like something lighter and just as noteworthy, stop in for lunch and give the Caesar a try.

With crisp Romaine, homemade crunchy croutons, and chicken that has that steakhouse-grill taste — pair your Caesar with a cup of one of their house soups (a new, different offering daily) and you've got yourself a meal.

What: Conchas

Where: Casa Cafe, 3505 W. 26th St.

Vibe: Ligera, suave, y dulce

On the menu as: Pan Dulce

Price: \$2 each or \$20/dozen



While these classic Mexican pastries are often referred to as Conchas (translating to English as shells — given their shape, this moniker is obvious), in Mexico they're known simply as Pan Dulce or Sweet Bread. And what can seem so simple, when done correctly like at Casa Cafe, the soft, delicately sweetened, crispy, multicolored, streusel-topped beauties become the perfect light breakfast treat or a sweet ending to a spicy meal. Tip: try the stuffed Concha on their dessert menu — filled with strawberries, cream, and hazelnut spread — to take this classic to the next level.

What: Salmon Crepe

Where: Give A Crepe La CrepeErie, 2431 Peach St.

Vibe: New York deli meets Erie crepe love

On the menu as: Saumon Sale Crepe

Price: \$15

Recommended by: Sarah Moody via Facebook

The vibe inside Give A Crepe is super fun. Chef Stephani Klassen (of 2023's 40 Under 40 class) spins the crepes in an open kitchen (so customers can enjoy the art of it), her coworkers are in sync, and they all seem to truly enjoy making your food — which ultimately makes the food better. The Saumon Sale crepe, as recommended via social media, tasted like a well-thought-out dish executed with love and care. A French twist on the Jew-



ish-American classic bagel with lox, Give A Crepe takes its salty, smoky, dilly, creamy, oniony goodness and wraps it in a pillowy blanket of love, crepe-style. With salt-cured salmon made in-house and the savory, herby crepe base, this dish is a powerhouse of flavor and a satisfying lunch.

While Give A Crepe doesn't have in-house seating available, they encourage you to take your food to eat next door at Tippy Bean Cafe (winner of 2023's Best Coffee Shop). I paired my Saumon Sale crepe with a Lucky Charm Iced Chai (chai with pistachio), and it was *chef's kiss* fantastic.

What: Almond Bear Claw

Where: Herb and Honey Bakery, 310 E. 24th St.

Vibe: Otherworldly, flaky perfection

On the menu as: Bear Claw, Almond

Price: \$3.75



Ok, so we're featuring the Almond Bear Claw as our Can't Miss Dish, but that's just because we were forced to pick only one thing at Herb and Honey. And the Al-

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mond Bear Claw is perfection in pastry form. But, the real Can't Miss Dish at Herb and Honey Bakery is LITERALLY ANYTHING ON THE MENU. Seriously, you can't go wrong. Where we feel proprietor Jessica Schultz (Erie's 40 Under 40 Class of 2023) truly excels is in puff pastry. It feels impossible how light, crispy, delicate, and buttery her croissants, bear claws, puffs, and cruffins are. But that's not discounting Herb and Honey's more doughy creations like pretzels, sourdough bread, and seasonal items like Maritzzi at Valentine's Day or Polish Sweet Bread at Easter which will have you wishing those holidays were happening year-round.

What: Panang Curry with Chicken
Where: Like My Thai, 827 State St.
Vibe: Spicy Creamy Crunchy Herby
On the menu as: Panang Curry
Price: \$15



If you're looking for a big, warming, bowl of Southeast Asian comfort — a little sweet, a little spicy (or, really, as spicy as you'd like), tender, flavorful chicken, the freshest veg, a healthy row of crushed peanuts, alongside a peppery row of Thai basil — this bowl o' curry is as beautiful as it is mouthwatering. In this writer's opinion, the best way to enjoy this curry is at the bar on a busy Friday night (alongside an appetizer of chicken on a stick — it is absurdly juicy). The smoky heat, the occasional bursts of fire from a wok-laden cooktop, the savory smells — all while bearing witness to the well-balanced, efficient dance between cook/server/busser who all seem to truly enjoy each other and the hustle, all set to a chill hippie-jazz soundtrack. It is a sight to behold and, in the truest sense of the word, a vibe.

What: Saffron Butter Candle
Where: Lucero, 940 W. Erie Plaza Dr.
Vibe: Glowingly gorgeous
On the menu as: Sourdough Bread with Saffron Butter Candle
Price: \$9

This appetizer sets the mood for the incredible meal you're about to enjoy at Lucero, Erie's latest fine-dining enterprise from Dan Kern (2013's 40 Under 40 Class), the brains behind nearby Bar Rōnin. Specializing in



Spanish cuisine, the whole vibe of the meal is about sharing (either small plates/tapas or larger, shareable meals) and the saffron butter candle, as it slowly melts into a dippable pool of fragrant butter for the sourdough bread to sop up, is the perfect centerpiece to a tapas meal. The best-selling item on their menu, the saffron butter is just one stop for the sourdough bread — as it becomes a vehicle for a number of the other tapas offered like cured meats, aged cheeses, whipped feta, etc. Let your imagination run wild and get into the mood that is Lucero.

What: Buffalo Chicken Pizza
Where: Mama Mia's Pizzeria, 1529 W. 38th St.
Vibe: The best of both worlds
On the menu as: Buffalo Chicken Specialty Pizza
Price: \$15.95



What do you want for dinner: pizza or wings? Why choose one when you can have the best of both worlds with Mama Mia's Buffalo Chicken Pizza. Ok, can you get

fancier pizza somewhere else? Sure. What Mama Mia's gives you is straight-up old-school pie — fresh dough, flavorful sauce, quality toppings, set on a perfectly crisp crust that holds its shape when you pick it up while still being bubbly and chewy inside. It's a workhorse; it's a go-to; it's perfect.

And the Buffalo Chicken variety is particularly craveable because it scratches that hot wing itch: the sauce of the pizza is ranch dressing — giving it just the right amount of spicy and creamy. The tender shredded chicken on top has little burny, crispy bits from the pizza oven. Highly recommended with a side of ranch for dipping and a tall glass of some refreshingly balanced beer from Erie Ale Works (with killer beers constantly on rotation, for pizza you'll want to go with something golden like Cold Leftovers, Nexus of the Universe, or Blast Off — if you're lucky enough to catch it).

What: Falafel King
Where: Shawarma King, 1042 W. 26th St.
Vibe: Crispy-but-not-greasy
On the menu as: Vegetarian
Price: \$12.99
Recommended by: Dan Schank, Contributing Writer



It's hard to find a fancy way to describe what's good about Shawarma King's falafel. That's because what makes it great isn't some new spin on Mediterranean cuisine — it's just fresh ingredients, creamy hummus, nutty tahini, and pickles I never get to enjoy because my two young daughters always gobble them up first. The perfect takeout option for a tired parent who wants quality food while avoiding dishes.

What: Veggie Platter
Where: Tandoori Hut, 2605 Washington Ave.
Vibe: Voraciously Vegetal
Price: \$15.99
On the menu as: Vegetarian Thali of Tandoori Hut
 Tandoori Hut is the real deal and they've got staying

JESSICA HUNTER



power. Originally a staple on North Park Row in Downtown Erie, they found their permanent home in the restaurant space on 26th and Washington that has been a part of the fabric of the Erie restaurant scene for generations (most recently Summerhouse Cafe and before that, Fergie's). Tandoori Hut has built customer loyalty over the years because of their authenticity and bold flavors. Our veggie-editor Brian chose this as his Can't Miss Dish because of the variety of flavor and texture, the presentation (this item is only available in-house, not to-go), and the satisfying nature of this fully vegetarian dish. Featuring multiple vegetarian dishes on one segmented platter, including Navrattan korma, palak paneer, dal, basmati rice, naan bread, raita, and rice pudding, there's plenty for sharing. Get a homemade Masala chai or a refreshing mango lassi to really set this meal off.

What: Chicken Wonton Ramen with Crispy Shallots
Where: Wooden Ladle Ramen and Rice Bowls, 4753 W. Lake Rd.
Vibe: Slurpably Savory
On the menu as: Ramen: Chicken Wonton
Price: \$16

Recommended by: Dave Tamulonis via Instagram
 The Wooden Ladle, nestled in a stone cottage in a quiet nook off of 12th Street (the former Stonehouse Inn), isn't just offering delicious, homemade Japanese food; they're offering a real dining experience. With friendly and informative waitstaff, ready to explain any of the dishes — the meal you have at Wooden Ladle will be a winner, soup to nuts. With a plethora of savory appetizers available, we recommend the Gyoza — or chicken dumplings — they are handmade, tender, delicate, and flavorful. But the real star of the show is the ramen. The Chicken Wonton Ramen, as recommended via social media, is a perfect balance of fresh noodles, vegetables, crispy garnish, and seasoned ground chicken encased in perfectly pinched, tender pouches. It is the best of both worlds, combining a wonton soup with a satisfying ramen bowl. The soft egg, crisp nori, and quintessential wooden ladle set it all off. Be sure to enjoy your meal with a signature Rose Tea Lemonade for a floral, herbaceous twist on a classic American lemonade and end with a homemade dessert (we enjoyed the subtly matcha-scented crème brûlée). Who's stuffed?

JESSICA HUNTER



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Pepperoni Balls: The Lifebread of Erie

A history of the “tasty, very tasty, extra tasty” local phenomenon

By: Jonathan Burdick

One summer during my teenage years, I was camping outside of Pennsylvania. I met some other bored teenagers and, for whatever reason, our conversation drifted towards school lunches. I was a fan, I'd said with a shrug. That rectangular oversauced school pizza, while objectively not very good pizza, was still somehow really good. Those chicken patties? My dad would shell out enough money so I could get two of them. Italian dunker days might as well have been a holiday.

And who could forget pepperoni balls? In my opinion, I had argued, they're perfect the way they are, although some dipped them in ranch (misguided), marinara (reasonable), or hot sauce (next level). There was even that one underclassman who always smothered his in ketchup (a travesty).

My new friends looked puzzled. Pepperoni... balls? Similar to the first time that I mentioned the words “Giant Eagle” to a perplexed non-Pennsylvanian, I learned that day that my beloved pep balls weren't everywhere. Our lunchroom delicacy wasn't universally available outside of the Erie area.

“So, like pepperoni rolls?” one kid asked. There are admittedly other variations of dough and pepperoni: rolls, breads, muffins, and even loaves. Yet, the pepperoni ball is something unique: those baseball-sized balls of sweet dough encasing fresh slices of pepperoni I soon realized are distinctly Erie's.

Over the years, pepperoni balls have become intertwined with Erie's cultural identity. “Pepperoni balls, Smith's hot dogs, a Sara's ice cream cone, and Mad Anthony's Ale make up our four basic food groups,” joked Erie Times-News reporter John Guerriero in 2006.

Gordon's Butcher and Market sells them as one of four edible Erie staples in their shippable Erie Box. Erie Apparel sells pepperoni ball t-shirts. Two local sports teams have rebranded as the Erie Pepperoni Balls for promotional days: first, the NBA G-League's Erie Bayhawks in 2018 and then the Erie Seawolves in 2023 (both offering plenty of merchandise). Around Erie, one can buy pepperoni ball stickers, hoodies, hats, bobbleheads, greeting cards, and, yes, even baby onesies.

Not everyone in Erie agrees on what makes the perfect pepperoni ball either. They are often linked nostalgically with childhood memories: lunchrooms, but also sporting events, school fundraisers, a favorite neighborhood bakery, or afternoon snacks at a friend's house. Some prefer theirs fried, while others like them baked. Some like them lighter and fluffier, while others like a crisp outside. There are preferences related to the spiciness of the pepperoni or if they should include cheese. Some will even argue that if they don't have those little ridges from the cooking racks, they aren't authentic. However one decides to eat them though, they don't last long when offered at parties.

JESSICA HUNTER



Little is more well-known to Erieites and confusing to out-of-towners than the pepperoni ball. These rounds of fried dough stuffed with the spicy salami had their origins in Erie's Little Italy, initially as fish balls, morphing over the years into the local delicacy we enjoy today.

Undoubtedly, there are similarities with the pepperoni roll, popularized by West Virginia coal miners during the 1930s as an easy, high-calorie meal made from scrap deli meat and dough. In Erie though, the origins are closely connected to fish balls, once a staple offered at bakeries and markets throughout the city. As one might surmise, these were scraps of fish wrapped in small balls of fried or baked dough. These were popular throughout many Italian-American neighborhoods across the country and Erie's Little Italy was no exception. Any fish that didn't sell at market could easily be combined with a bakery's surplus dough and voila! A new product to sell. Some savvy bakers also substituted excess deli meats. Before long, pepperoni had caught on with the public, the spicy salami making for a delicious contrast to the sweet bread.

Pepperoni itself was a relatively new creation. According to most accounts, pepperoni was first created by Italian immigrants around 1919 in New York City. A 1920 bulletin from the Department of Agriculture referred to this new concoction as an “unsmoked dried summer sausage which is stuffed in thin and narrow sheep or hog casings.” It had a “special curing mixture” giving it its distinct red coloring and its drying period was significantly faster than other cured meats.

The first mention of pepperoni in the Erie Daily Times wasn't until 1938. Salvatore Pedano, a local grocer, was arrested for selling two cans of tomatoes and

a pound of pepperoni (described as a “spicy type of sausage”) on a Sunday. It wasn't until after World War II that pepperoni began to be advertised more regularly in the newspaper though. The first to advertise its sale in Erie was the Mohican Market and Bakery in 1947. Located at 1203 State St., they sold it for about 60 cents per pound, roughly the same price as bacon. The arrival of pizza in the city further popularized its use. That same year, Erie's Original Pizza Shop at 710 W. 18th St. began advertising their “sensational” pizzas with pepperoni. Within a decade, it was a regular offering at most grocery stores, delis, and pizza shops, advertised with descriptors such as “zesty,” “flavorful,” “tempting,” “tasty,” “very tasty,” “extra tasty,” and “delicious.”

Exactly who was the first to stuff pepperoni into the dough and sell it isn't entirely clear. According to Stanganelli's Italian Foods, they still have Cosmo Stanganelli's original recipe from 1961. By the time they were popular enough to be advertised in the newspaper a few years later, they were a well-established local treat. The very first mention of pepperoni balls in the Erie Daily Times was in 1964 by Paul's Restaurant and Pizza Palace on West 26th Street. Like many establishments then, they advertised them alongside fish balls, both of which sold for about a nickel each.

Joe's Pizza Shop on Cascade Street began advertising them the following year. By 1969, a frozen option by DiSalvo's was being offered in local grocery stores.



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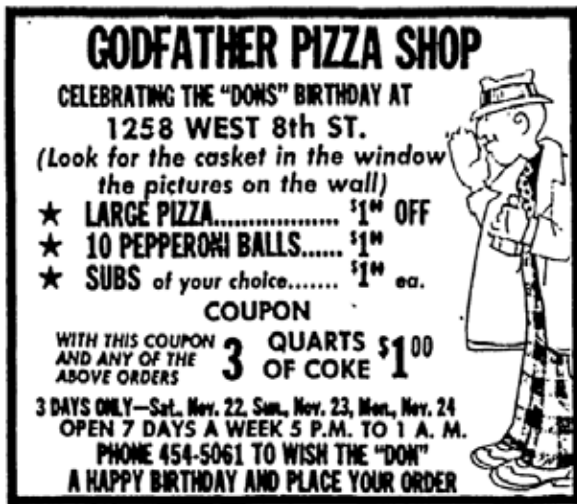


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A plethora of pizza shops in Erie began advertising pepperoni balls on their menus in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the pizza-adjacent snack began to gain popularity throughout the Erie region.

Art's Bakery started making them around this time too. While many places did not advertise in the newspapers, making it difficult to know when they began offering them, throughout the 1970s many did. These establishments included Pat Crudo's Pizza, Marc's Pizzeria, Alfee's Pizza, Godfather Pizza, Pizza Palace, Pizza Heaven, Presque Isle Pizza, Parmento's Pepperoni Balls and Pizza, Doc's Tavern, Cassano's Pizza and Seafood, Tom Yacobozzi's Best Pizza, Fabrizio's Italian

Restaurant, Lombardi's Pizza, Pio's, Arnone's, Dee's, and Corsi's.

Meanwhile, fish balls were disappearing from menus while pepperoni balls were becoming a local culinary star. By the 1980s, pep balls seemed to be everywhere: the Italian Festival, schools, fundraisers, roller rinks, Little League games, grocery chains like Super Duper and Loblaws, as well as most of Erie's markets and bakeries.

With the turn of the century, the pepperoni ball was being mentioned by the Erie Times-News more than lake effect snow. It had, perhaps inexplicably, become a part of Erie's identity, a source of pride, something pined after by those who moved away and wrote home asking for recipes. On Reddit alone, there are multiple threads dedicated to replicating Erie-style pepperoni balls. "I make homemade Erie Pepperoni Balls at least once or twice a month," one Los Angeles resident posted, sharing their recipe and process.

Today, everybody seems to have their favorite pepperoni ball brand, whether it's Stanganelli's, International Bakery, Majestic Bakery, or another neighborhood bakery, market, or restaurant (I could name them all, but I'd surpass my word count pretty quickly). Each place has their own interpretation too. Art's Bakery offers a jalapeño version. Herb & Honey Bakery makes a "pretzelroni" ball. BIGBAR offers a half-pound fried version with a hot pepper cheese option. Beergr Foods, an Erie-based food vlog, even made a YouTube video about a pepperoni ball burger — basically a fried pep-

peroni ball with hamburger inside.

At one time, there was an annual race at Presque Isle called the Jog 'n Hog, a "gastronomical challenge" that required racers to run two miles, eat six pepperoni balls, and then run the two miles back. There's even a Facebook group dedicated to pepperoni balls, which describes it as a "hot, greased, and fluffy delicacy" that is the "life bread of Erie."

In 2020, pepperoni balls flirted with national attention. Stanganelli's Italian Foods' flagship frozen pepperoni balls were featured on QVC. As described by the Erie Times-News at the time, the 18,000 pepperoni balls sold out before the segment even aired on television. The QVC host described them as "basically, like, your favorite pizza dough on the outside with a sandwich on the inside." Adding that it was neither a stromboli nor a calzone, the segment went on to explain that this "comfort food snack" was "almost like a pizza donut."

"Buffalo has the wing," observed the Erie Times-News in 2010. "Erie has the pepperoni ball." "I'm glad they didn't settle on bologna [back then]," one local baker joked. "Bologna balls. That just doesn't have the same ring to it."

Indeed, bologna balls might have never caught on in the same way. We'll stick with our pepperoni balls, Erie's flavorful, mouthwatering, mythical snack.

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

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A. Caplan Company: If You Cook, Stop and Look

Generational Waterford business keeps Erie cooking

By: Erin Phillips

My husband and I were sitting around the dinner table with our two young kids and, somehow, the conversation turned to the modern death of the perfectly written jingle. We then commenced to blow our kids' minds with pitch-perfect renditions of commercial jingles from the '80s and '90s — recollecting the lyrics and tune to the Juicy Fruit jingle verbatim, for example, came absolutely effortlessly. There's something about a catchy jingle that worms its way into your brain and never (and I mean *never*) leaves and we pondered why this isn't a tactic more businesses use today.

We then set ourselves the challenge of remembering some local commercial jingles and the first one that popped into my head was, "If you cook, stop and look. Come on out to Caplan's!" You just sang it while reading it, didn't you?

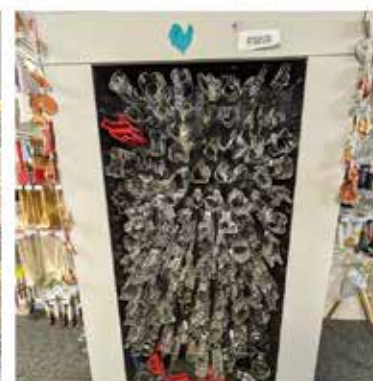
This jingle was first decided upon when the second-generation owner of a kitchen and restaurant supply business, Aaron Caplan, was trying to work out a slogan for his then budding company back in 1981. According to Aaron's son, Luke Caplan, "Dad was sitting around with some chums one night and needed an advertising slogan, and the rest is history. It's such a catchy and good slogan, some people actually think it's the name of the business."

That business, A. Caplan Company, a commercial and retail kitchen equipment supplier, has been a part of the Waterford community for over 40 years, and the building that they occupy has been a part of that same community for a good while longer. One can tell, even just in passing, that the Caplan storefront is unique: it has a mid-century butterfly roofline capping off a large awning covering the parking lot. The original building in the center of the A. Caplan Company footprint was originally built to be a Dog N' Suds franchise in 1967, and was run as such up through the late 1970s.

Dog N' Suds was a national franchise restaurant that got in on the ground floor of the fast food phenomenon that would inevitably sweep the nation. Begun in 1953, the first Dog N' Suds was built in Champaign, Illinois by Don Hamacher and Jim Griggs, who were music professors by trade but wanted to go into business for themselves and opened Dog N' Suds, a hot dog and root beer stand. They had quick success, eventually giving up their day jobs, as Dog N' Suds grew to become one of the most successful fast food chains in the country, with over 650 restaurants across 38 states. Seventy-one years later, there are still 15 Dog N' Suds restaurants in operation, mostly in the Midwest, still holding on to that old-school look and service model.

The Dog N' Suds in Waterford closed its doors in the late 1970s, housing a taco restaurant for a few years, while Aaron Caplan initially set up shop in the old service garage next door, carrying on his father's business of kitchen equipment sales. Aaron's parents,

ERIN PHILLIPS



The home cook will delight in the interesting and unique stock at A. Caplan Company – there is a vast array of cooking gadgets, equipment, utensils, and more available. It's like the slogan says: if you cook, you really should stop and look.

Isadore and Thelma Caplan, worked in the restaurant supply business in Pittsburgh throughout Aaron's childhood and beyond, from 1945 to 1992. Upon coming to Erie County to attend Edinboro University (and meeting his wife Janet there), Aaron Caplan decided to settle in Waterford and continue on Isadore's business model, just a little further north.

The Caplan family enjoys and honors the history of the building by collecting and displaying as much Dog N' Suds vintage merchandise as they can find. Luke Caplan explains, "Sometimes they would serve their food on frisbees instead of plates, and every now and then someone will bring us a Dog N' Suds frisbee. It was the whole drive-in scene — girls came out on skates with the food on trays. They were known for making original, homemade root beer." Atop a wooden root beer barrel in the center of the original building sits dozens of Dog N' Suds mugs and

cups, along with a framed Dog N' Suds tray liner that Luke found while digging a fire pit in his yard with his kids. The history is connected with the family, and they are happy to be that connection.

Luke Caplan shows me around the original part of the A. Caplan Company building first, explaining the layout and how it used to be when it was a restaurant. We pass an expansive display of cast iron cookware available in virtually any shape, size, and function, as he leads me into what was the first expansion of the building, and is currently housing their used commercial kitchen equipment. It is a vast swath of stainless steel — sink banks, pizza ovens, massive dough mixers, refrigeration units, industrial sized toasters, salamander ovens (a kind of upgraded broiler), ice cream machines, etc.

Luke explains that these items are mostly sourced from "grocery stores chains that update or no lon-

FEATURE

ger have a use for an item, restaurants going out of business, school cafeterias — at this point people often contact us to come salvage the equipment.” He explains why having a large inventory of these items in stock is important, “This industry, especially now with the internet, has become so competitive that having this stuff in stock is so critical. If something goes down, even the internet can’t get it to you the same day. But we’re able to stay competitive because of that curbside, same-day service.”

But the commercial supply part of the business is truly just one side of the coin. The home cook looking for hard-to-find gadgets, quality pots and pans, or someone who is looking for advice on which piece of equipment is best for their needs makes up the other half. Luke explains, “Very literally half of the clientele we get are household people coming in and shopping. We’ve really worked hard to get past the stereotype that we just sell to restaurants. From the road, you have no idea the place is this big, until you get in here.”

And boy, is it big. After Aaron Caplan built on the north addition, they quickly expanded to build on the southern addition which is where they house their home cooking supplies. If you’re coming in to shop around, this is where you’ll want to start. And if you like to cook or bake, you will feel like a kid in a candy store. There are so many interesting gadgets, many that you likely didn’t even know existed, to help make your home-cooking experience more fun, more efficient, and more productive. Everything from pots and pans, to cake molds in any conceivable shape, a whole wall of cookie cutters, cake decorating equipment, bread baking equipment, home preservation and canning equipment, meat processing tools, knives and cutlery, coffee making equipment and carafes, mixers, pickling crocks, glasswares, dinnerware sets (many of which are vintage and look to have been around since the very beginning), cookie jars, cutting boards, utensils, recipe boxes ... if you can think of it and it’s related to cooking, A. Caplan Company



Providing one of the only opportunities for professional knife sharpening locally, A. Caplan Company partners with local knife aficionado, Trevor Vaughan to offer the service once a month. Vaughan sharpens not only knives, but also cleavers, shears, and some garden tools.

has it. The Caplan family has worked hard to make shopping a fun and inviting experience. “We want to make it a personal experience and always fun. Fun to be here and fun to shop. We want to make sure that people enjoy being here. We always tell our staff, it’s like inviting someone into your home. We want to be good hosts,” Luke says.

In addition to kitchen supplies, both commercial and residential, A. Caplan Company is one of the only local resources for knife sharpening in Erie. The first Saturday of every month, Caplan’s partners with local knife guru Trevor Vaughan to offer knife sharpening services from 9 a.m. to noon, on site. According to Luke, “Folks can either bring their knives to get sharpened as they shop or drop them off prior and pick them up at their convenience. We have to warn you though, things get quite busy on these Saturday mornings so all knives are not always finished by noon. However, every customer receives a call once their order is complete.”

Prices range from \$4 to \$6 per knife, depending on blade length and type. “Trevor sharpens more than just knives. He’ll do cleavers, some tools like hedge trimmers, household shears, as well as repairing nicks or damage to knives. Trevor is quite the enthusiast and enjoys sharing his knowledge, sharpening process, and knife-collecting hobby with customers on site as he sharpens. Customers also have the opportunity to watch him while he works.”

During our tour, we run into Luke’s brother James Caplan, who joins our conversation. James used to work in plastics engineering, but decided to come join in to help with the family business a few years back.

Their mother, Janet, who retired from years spent as a school teacher, has been working exclusively in the store for nearly 10 years now. “It all just happened kind of naturally. We’ve got about 16 people on staff. We’re very blessed with our staff. They’re very dedicated, they all get along, they’re very fun to work with. We like to think we treat them well and it’s very mutual. They’ve got our back a lot,” Luke reflects.

I ask about the future of the business. Luke and James have six children between them, but, just as their parents never pushed, pressured, or expected them to take over the business, Luke and James are taking the same approach. Luke mentions, “I have one of the verses from the Tao Te Ching hanging on my office wall, and I’ll paraphrase, but it says, ‘the wise succeed when they don’t force an outcome’ and that’s kind of innately our approach.”

As our tour winds down, Luke invites me to take my time and look around. And I do. I stay for at least another hour, browsing all of the interesting curiosities available, listening to the knowledgeable staff answering people’s questions, and end up leaving with a few items I didn’t expect to find that day. It’s really just like that jingle says: if you cook, just stop in and look. You’re sure to find something interesting that you didn’t know you needed.

A. Caplan Company is located at 12607 Route 19 in Waterford. They can be found at caplancookware.com or by phone at (814) 796-3629

Erin Phillips, when not reciting vintage jingles for her family, can be found at erin@eriereader.com



The central storefront of what is now A. Caplan Company, a commercial and residential kitchen supply company in Waterford, was once one of a successful chain of fast food drive-in restaurants called Dog N’ Suds. Caplan’s has retained the signature look of the original building.



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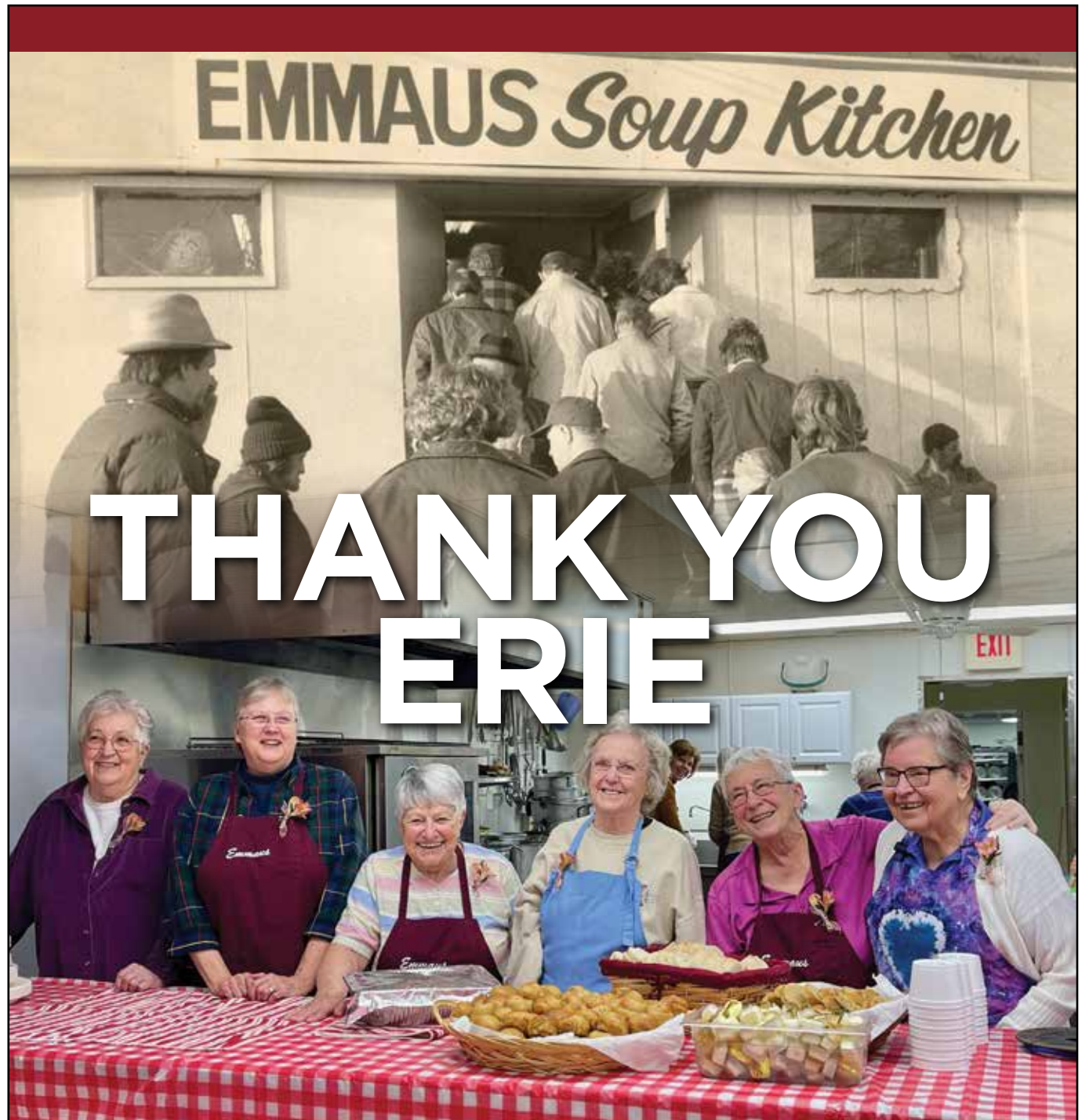
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Cultivating a Backyard Buffet

Edible landscaping business transforms Erie lawns into productive gardens

By: Alana Sabol

The first seeds of the edible landscaping company Eat Your Yard were sown when owner Tess Frawley witnessed the transformation of a backyard into a productive 7-acre permaculture farm. “It was an old plantation that a couple had renovated and they were trying to bolster the community atmosphere in this very, very small rural town in Georgia,” Frawley explains.

The backyard farm was complete with chicken coops, hoop houses, and raised beds, all in the middle of the small city of Sparta, Georgia.

Then, Frawley caught wind of Love and Carrots, a company in Washington D.C. that installed edible home gardens and considered bringing a similar concept to her hometown of Erie. “Instead of having all the food grown around the outskirts of the city and farmland, why couldn’t we just grow more of it here in town?”

Frawley also recognizes the need to increase food access in Erie. “A lot of our citizens in Erie live in food deserts and live in a zip code that is the most impoverished in the nation,” Frawley says. “I would love for everybody to have enough food so that they can then, in terms of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, reach the next level of fulfillment actualization.”

Following seasonal jobs at vegetable farms and a nine-week business course at Blasco Library in the spring of 2020, Eat Your Yard transformed from an idea into a business. The company assists with each step of creating an edible garden, from consultation to maintenance. Frawley also offers other landscaping services as well as educational workshops for those interested in learning how to grow and maintain a garden.

Eat Your Yard plans to host five workshops this year, following each step of planning a garden through design, installation, planting, and management. “I like to see it as a progression. People can participate in one class or all, or they can just pick up bits and pieces, or perhaps they have some experience already,” Frawley says.

The first Eat Your Yard workshop this year will occur on Saturday, March 9 at 10/20 Collective and will focus on the design phase of building a garden, along with an opportunity for seed swapping and a vendor market.

One of Frawley’s favorite garden installations took place at 10/20 Collective last fall, when she collaborated with school-age children from the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House to build a garden for the event space. Frawley works as an urban agriculture educator at the Art House, teaching an after-school program that meets three times a week.

“Some of the classes are geared toward gardening, some are geared toward using grown produce in fresh meals,” Frawley explains. “Then some are more general neighborhood beautification, or looking at watersheds, or just being nature detectives and try-

CONTRIBUTED



Eat Your Yard, a local company run by green thumb Tess Frawley, aims to help people create their own edible gardens, for either their own or their community’s consumption, assisting at all points of garden creation from consultation to maintenance, including landscaping services and educational workshops.

ing to get outside.”

When Frawley took two groups of children, one younger and one older, from the Art House across the street to 10/20 Collective, they were eager to begin building the garden.

“I was stunned by how excited these kids were to build a garden space,” Frawley says. “They were all running around, hauling compost, shoveling it into wheelbarrows, and I just love the energy of it because usually I’m doing that by myself and it can be rather tedious.”

After the garden was built, an older group of children planted garlic bulbs to come up this spring.

“It just felt nice to get a start. You know, things take time and even the small steps, they’re going to amount to something. So, it’s just really nice to have another connection in that community right there,” Frawley says, reflecting on the experience.

For those wanting to grow something for the first time in their yard, or try their hand at growing something new, Frawley recommends potatoes or kale. “Potatoes are an easy way to start and that’s a staple

food for a lot of people, whether they realize it or not,” Frawley says. “Most people are probably eating potato chips or French fries on the regular, myself included.”

However, Frawley explains that not everyone can grow every vegetable in their yard due to lack of space or environmental factors, but that sharing produce with neighbors can provide an opportunity for connecting as a community.

“It’s more about supporting each other as a whole community than everybody individually trying to grow everything that they need,” Frawley says. “I think that’s an important piece that I’ve been learning over the years. It’s full of lessons, out in the garden.”

For more information on Eat Your Yard including services, workshops, and pricing, visit eatyouryarderie.com

Alana Sabol can often be found snuggling her cats or baking at Herb and Honey on the weekends. She can be reached at alanacsabol@gmail.com.



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Preserving Personal and Local Food Heritage: Chef Morgan Yezzi

An interview about family recipes, vintage cookbooks, and upcoming classes

By: Erin Phillips

In a world where it seems everyone and their mother has a food blog or is out there on social media creating jump-cut reels of food demos for likes on TikTok, there's Chef Morgan Yezzi, analog to the core. A self-created food historian and lover of all things handwritten, ancestral, or connected to a memory, his goal is to honor Erie's food legacy while creating a new Erie food history, based on collecting family recipes, food journals, heritage cookbooks, and more.

He's recently partnered with Grounded Print and Paper Shop, "an interdisciplinary, contemporary print and paper-making shop/artist residency located in Erie's Little Italy neighborhood," to offer a three-part class to help others in Erie acknowledge and honor their own family's food history, whether that's through preserving handwritten family recipes or creating their own handmade recipe cards while learning to bind them into artfully made, hand-bound books and recipe boxes.

I recently connected with Yezzi over his research on local Erie historic cookbooks, including Laura Sterrett's own *The Erie Cookbook*, that has been covered within the pages of the Reader before, and jumped at the chance to get to know more about him. The following Q & A covers his inspirations, his current projects, the collaboration with Grounded Print Shop, and his goals for the future.

Erin Phillips (EP): Tell me about yourself and how you became interested in food history.

Morgan Yezzi (MY): I was born and raised in Erie. I am a verdant home cook, domestic bad boy, home ec granny, physical recipe archivist, consumer science enthusiast, partner, dog dad, and lover of long breakfasts.

My cooking can be described as an elevated and easy melting pot of comfort food with a focus on transforming the nostalgia from the kitchens of my past to the kitchens of my present. My mission is to inspire you to build more conscious recipe collections and think about how physical recipes connect us in the kitchen, where the shared experience of cooking and eating together transforms us into storytellers.

I am currently cooking in my grand-

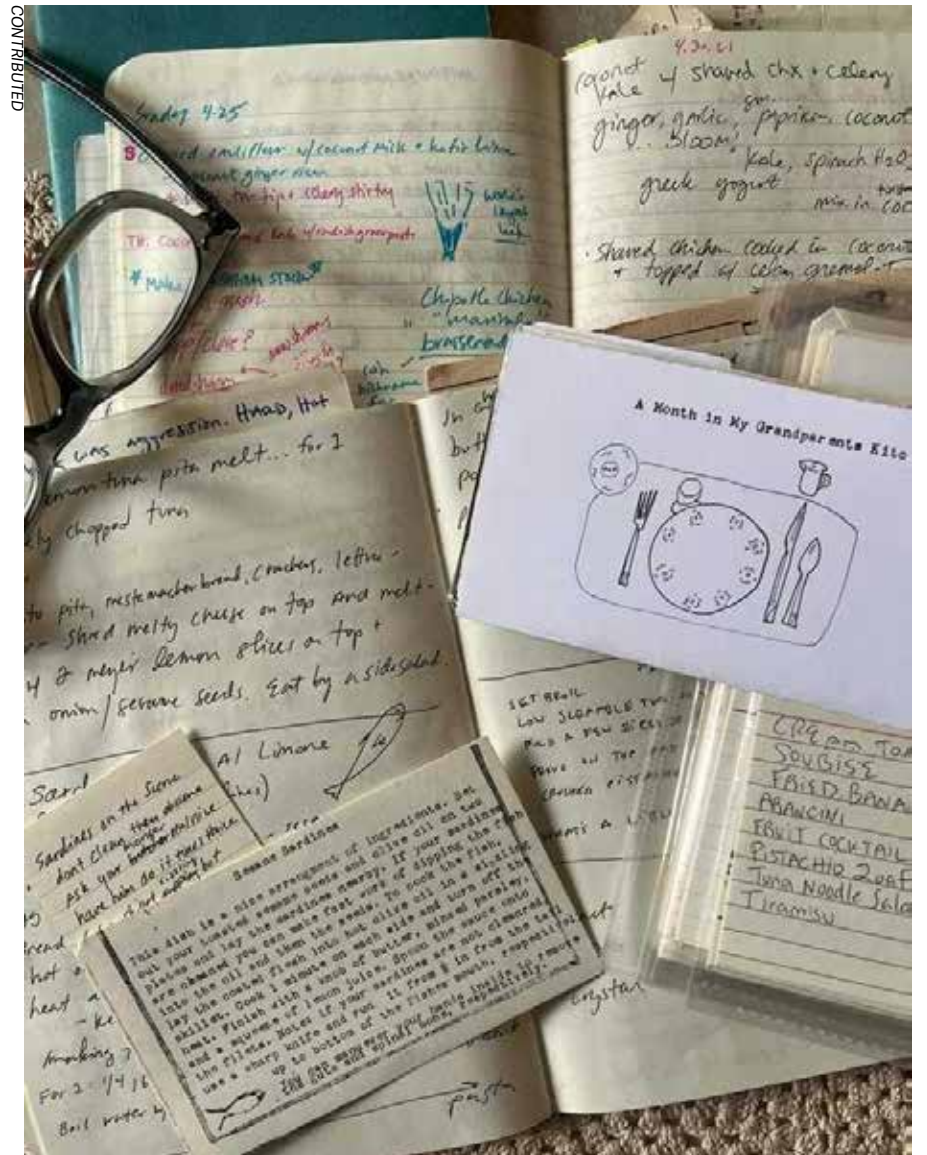
parents' vacant house on the west side of Erie. The house is a time capsule of objects from the 1960s to the present, so needless to say, time is standing still. I am cooking on the same stove and using the same oven my grandma used all her life.

While I do have a digital footprint (@Yezball), I am averse to recording recipes digitally, because my phone is not an heirloom I am hoping to pass down. So, like my mom and my late grandmas, and a few other influential people in my life, I like to record physical copies of all of my recipes.

EP: How did your interest in heritage recipes translate into your upcoming class at Grounded Print Shop? Talk a little bit about the upcoming class, what will be covered, what the vibe will be like, and why you chose Grounded to collaborate with?

MY: None of this would be possible without Grounded Print Shop. Ashley's (Pastore, owner Grounded Print and Paper Shop, and 40 Under 40 Class of 2022) resources inside of those walls continuously unlock the practices that I have been trying to produce in my work. There are moments in history that you read about when people meet, for example: Julia Child meeting Judith Jones or Bert meeting Ernie, that just change the course of history. That was Ashley and I meeting at Grounded on Gallery Night just before Christmas last year. We chatted on Erie's food scene, disrupting Erie, and she showed me the Grounded space, but it wasn't until weeks later that we connected about our shared passion for preserving the past and our general love for food. I showed her my way of recording recipes and a few pieces of food ephemera I've been inspired by and she said, "This needs to be a class."

So now, it is a class, a class on recipe filing and bookbinding. Under Ashley's guidance, we will be making two different book structures to hold our recipes — a long stitch book as well as a custom recipe box. The class will also be an examination on how the way in which we cook and record our recipes makes up our personal story as well as different organizational strategies to file recipes. Additionally, we will get into the practice of recording and writing down recipes as opposed to storing



Keeping food journals and recording recipes by hand are ways in which Morgan Yezzi connects with his family heritage. Encouraging others to preserve their family recipes, Yezzi is collaborating with Grounded Print and Paper Shop to teach this art in a three-part class throughout March, in which participants will create handmade recipe books and boxes.

them digitally.

Our hope for the class is that it's an open parlor for anyone to attend and discuss the way in which physical recipes connect them to their past while still being present in their future. We want to see people's personal recipes, family recipes, boxes of index cards, stuffed folders, dog-eared books, or rubber-banded stacks. We will also have some nosh and welcome others to bring any food or drink to share as well.

EP: Can you tell me a little about your own food history? What recipes from your family history are important to you? Why do you think it is important to preserve this kind of food history?

MY: I can still remember where

each of my grandmothers kept their cookbooks in the kitchen. Each one is stuffed full of recipes reaching back a generation; mostly family recipes shared between mothers, sisters, cousins but also with newer ones mixed in from family friends. The level of detail within these books has stayed with me for my whole life and because of that core memory, I have been keeping detailed cooking journals for the better part of 15 years.

Both of my parents and my brother are very active in the kitchen; we are always sharing recipes. My dad makes donuts and bread, my mom is a vegetable and soup connoisseur, and my brother is a sauce and grill aficionado.



Self-described “lover of long breakfasts” Chef Morgan Yezzi makes his daily morning meal a thoughtful one. Drawing from family recipes, heritage cookbooks, and cooking in his grandmother’s kitchen, Yezzi honors history simply by preparing and enjoying breakfast each day.

For years, my mom and I have been experimenting with my grandma’s pierogi recipe to the point where we have perfected it as well as her stuffed cabbage and czarnina (duck soup), which is another recipe that has always been of interest to me.

My grandma used to have to bribe me and my brother to eat duck soup (anyone unfamiliar should know that it is a traditional Polish blood-based soup). My Papa was the one who ended up guiding me on how to perfect the recipe. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meat for being the only place I have ever been able to find duck blood in the country.

My true passion is cooking, but the act of preserving how I cook is what really drives me to continue cooking.

Getting down to it, the way I cook and record my recipes is connected to my grieving process for both of my grandmothers. The main way I felt connected to them when they were alive was through their food and now that they have passed it’s a way of me keeping them close.

EP: Do you like to experiment with vintage recipes? What are some of your favorites? What are some things you’ve learned from reading vintage/historic cookbooks?

MY: I collect vintage cookbooks like it’s nobody’s business, but I am selective about which recipes I actually set out to make. I just got a copy of *The Lily Wallace New American Cookbook* at an estate sale, choosing it because I liked the chapter graphics — it has



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FEATURE

ended up being one of the most interesting and well-executed cookbooks I've collected. Older cookbooks have taught me two things: embrace variety and live economically.

There's a passage in *The Erie Cook Book* where Mrs. Sterrett refers to using a "crumb jar" so I have started keeping one myself. I eat a mountain of bread every week and the crumbs and heels I generate now get swept into a jar on a shelf in my kitchen waiting there for me when I make meatballs or need a bit of body in a vinaigrette.

I am going to start sharing more of my cookbook collection and the way that I use my cookbooks as inspiration on Instagram in the coming months.

EP: How do you hope to grow this project in the future?

MY: My hope is to inspire a movement where everyone begins to build more conscious and communal recipe collections. That starts by keeping a journal of your eating and kitchen habits, your food preferences, grocery lists, menus, recipes you want to try out, restaurants you want to go to, and so on. Putting a pen to paper makes it all the more personal.

If I could visit everyone's kitchen in the world, I would, because I am interested in learning how people cook. I want to continue working with Grounded Print Shop to scale my recipes and create a monthly mail order subscription service for recipes, featuring some friends and guests along the way. Through this, my goal is to create a recipe file categorized accord-

ing to my life for people to have in their home where they can add to the file and create a trove of their own recipes. People always ask me if and when I am writing a cookbook, to which I respond, "not yet, but I will have recipes available soon!" Last summer at The

"My hope is to inspire a movement where everyone begins to build more conscious and communal recipe collections. That starts by keeping a journal of your eating and kitchen habits ... Putting a pen to paper makes it all the more personal." –Morgan Yezzi

Great American Book Sale, I found a copy of a cookbook called *Tastes and Tales of Erie, Pennsylvania* and it holds the recipes of Erie's cultural clubs and social organizations as well as some historic recipes. Think the pierogi recipe from The Polish Falcons Club and Harry Burleigh's Maple Pecan Cake. Creating an updated community cookbook would be a fantastic project as

a lot has changed in our community since 1971 so I would like to reflect upon that. On the horizon, I would like to start hosting more food-focused community events in the form of pot-lucks, recipe swaps, and pop-up dinner parties.

Morgan Yezzi at a glance:

Go to cookbooks: *The Family Meal: Home Cooking with Ferran Adria* by Ferran Adria, *The Breakfast Book* by Marion Cunningham, and *Power Vegetables* by Peter Meehan

Fun Food Fact: I shared a cheeseburger with Martha Stewart at Eeeeeatscon in Queens, N.Y.

A Favorite Recipe I Collaborated On: In respect to the East Coast delicacy, the fluffernutter sandwich, my previous boss and I, Dan Pelosi, made a Fluffernutter Ice Cream Cake.

Go-to Weeknight meal: A wedge salad
Lazy meal/lots of work meal: Garlic soup/fresh pasta

To register for the Recipe Bookmaking Class being held on Tuesdays from Mar. 12 through Mar. 26 at Grounded Print and Paper shop, visit: groundedprintshop.com

Morgan Yezzi can be found, forever making breakfast, on Instagram @Yezzbball

Erin Phillips can be reached at erin@eriereader.com.

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Gem City Style: March 2024

Fantasy meals with four of our Can't Miss Dish creators

By: Jessica Hunter

This month, I caught up with some of the chefs and creators behind a few of the items that were featured in our annual Can't Miss Dishes. Each proprietor was also featured as an Erie Reader 40 Under 40 honoree in the past (2023 alumna Jessica Schultz invited her staff to chime in).

I asked each of them: **If you could invite any person to dinner, who would it be? What would be on the menu? What would you talk about?**

Stephani Klassen, owner Give A Crepe La CrepeErie LLC (Featured Can't Miss Dish: Saumon Sale Crepe)



My first instinct is to say one of the greats who has passed, but then again, I would just take that as an opportunity to learn instead of wanting to cook for them, so truly: my whole family. I come from a blended family, and to get all of us together (including those who have passed), that's roughly 80 people. And for one event, that hasn't happened in about 23 years, and it wasn't even on my radar back then that I would love cooking for others as much as I do now! So yeah, my WHOLE family. It would be an honor to have the opportunity to thank them with a meal for all their influence and guidance over my life.

In terms of the menu, oh golly. Definitely items would have to be gluten free, vegan, and also meat heavy! So:

Appetizer: Butternut squash bisque finished with a vegan sage cream

Entree: Wine-braised short ribs, English roasted potatoes, sauteed asparagus, and herb-marinated roasted mushrooms

Salad: Roasted radicchio finished with blue cheese and a white balsamic pomegranate reduction. A from-age board with Gravlax.

Dessert: Pavlova (it was the first thing I ever made on my own) and panna cotta

We would talk about all the culinary influences on their lives and favorite dishes they grew up with — the best memories of life, really. I would hope to hear about what kept them "giving a crepe" about their lives, because without them, I wouldn't be the Crepe Lady now.

The Staff of Herb and Honey Bakery (Featured Can't Miss Dish: Almond Bear Claw) Jessica Schultz (Owner)



I'd like to have dinner with my great, great granddaughter and make her my grandmother's pierogi recipe. I'd love for her to share with me what the future is like: Are there finally people in positions of power who will be around for the consequences of their decisions? What's the current concept of gender? Has AI been used for good? How does her generation view millennials? Did we make the world better or worse?

Ameliarose Wagner

I would invite Carmen Maria Machado to dinner. We would talk about authors transcending conventional genre boundaries in literature, what art means to the artist vs. those who consume it, and why works exploring the experiences, societal expectations, and personal identities of marginalized groups face censorship in modern-day America. The menu would include fettuccine alfredo with fresh basil, sourdough garlic bread, and roasted asparagus.

Vince Bartone

So the answer from my heart: a small party of older women who have cooked throughout history and we'd just have a bunch of finger foods and unending tea and we'd just sit and spill the tea. I feel like so much cooking has been done overwhelmingly by minorities and women but the people that get credit are the men who have commodified it.

Alana Sabol

Anthony Bourdain. We would talk about food and travel. The meal would be cacio e pepe.

Vicki Wont

I'd love to just eat dinner with all of my friends, ideally sitting on someone's living room floor, sharing communal platters of food prepared by someone's mother or grandmother without the use of a recipe. No one's quiet, everyone shares, everyone leaves refreshed.

Dan Kern, owner of Lucero (Featured Can't Miss Dish: Saffron Butter Candle with Sourdough Bread)

If I could invite one person to dinner it would have to be the late Kobe Bryant (rest in power). He's one of my personal heroes and has taught me many things about myself. He unabashedly loved his craft and never apologized about his competitiveness or intensity. He loved



and was dedicated to his family (fellow girl dad) in the same way that he loved basketball. I'd love to talk to him about his passion for the game and how he balanced that with his family life. Stories about his championships won and lost and how he remained a student of the game.

I think the older I get the more I crave simplicity when cooking for others, so focusing on creating a great evening more than what I am cooking would be my preference. A warm summer night in August with a few killer bottles of wine, some shellfish over a wood fire, some crusty bread with softened butter and flaky salt. Maybe overlooking a beautiful body of water somewhere sounds nice!

Dharma Amrita Gurung, owner of Tandoori Hut (Featured Can't Miss Dish: Vegetarian Thali)



I would love to invite the former CEO of the Erie Downtown Development Corporation, John Persinger to dinner. The menu would be a beloved Indian dish which is Chicken Tikka Masala with rice and naan. I would just truly want to say thank you — because of their development plan, Tandoori Hut Indian Cuisine landed in a safe, good location, and became even more popular in the city.



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EVENTS

PACA Tackles Timeless Themes of Addiction, Illness, and Family Dynamics

Local cast takes on classic Eugene O'Neill play, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*

PREMIERES FRIDAY, MAR. 8

"The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future, too..." is what Mary Tyrone replies to her husband James, when he tells her to forget the past in Eugene O'Neill's classic, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

That sentiment is echoed by play director Josh Mizikowski, "The show takes place around the 1910s. Every issue this family has: drugs, alcohol, possible fatal illness, are all things we face today just as much as we did then — the heart-break is the same as it ever was."

Mizikowski, no stranger to the Erie theater scene, has been involved as both an actor and director for over 25 years at the Erie Playhouse, A3, Dramashop, Laugh/Riot, and others including PACA. Last year he co-directed *Mauritius* in addition to having to jump into an acting role. The cast for this production includes familiar PACA faces Lisa Simonian, Michael Burns, and Luke Scribner as well as Roland Robinson and Gretchen Knapp, who are PACA newcomers.

The Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning play follows the Tyrone Family "over the course of one day where a number of secrets and hard truths are confronted. As the day progresses this downhill snowball of truth and revelations eventually becomes an avalanche," explains Mizikowski. When asked about the play selection process, Mizikowski says that

"Arguably, this is the greatest American play ever written and Erie has an amazing talent pool — our loyal audiences deserve this amazing work." — *Long Day's Journey* director Josh Mizikowski

he and PACA Executive Director Mark Tanenbaum discussed a few options by great American playwrights and decided on a "go big or go home" approach. "Arguably, this is the greatest American play ever written and Erie has an amazing talent pool — our loyal audiences deserve this amazing work," adds Mizikowski.

Whether you are new to PACA or a reg-



PACA's latest production of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is a theatrical classic with timeless themes of heartbreak, addiction, and difficult family relationships. The play has won multiple awards throughout its tenure in the canon and will soon be brought to life locally under the direction of Josh Mizikowski

ular attendee, Mizikowski says "this will probably be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. A great American classic play that is rarely done — to see it locally shouldn't be missed." — Edwina Capozziello

Fridays and Saturdays, Mar. 8 through 23 at 7:30 p.m. // Thursday, Mar. 14 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Mar. 17 at 2 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$20 // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com

Sy Smith Proves She's the Queen of Underground Soul at MIAC

Prolific songstress tours in support of latest album

TUESDAY, MAR. 12

If you happen to be unfamiliar with Sy Smith, it's only going to take a few seconds for you to understand why she's known as "The Queen of Underground Soul." A monumental talent, Smith has been crafting innovative music for well over 20 years. Her latest album, *Until We Meet Again* is a gorgeously lush collection of tracks that showcase both the smoothness and the agility of her and her band. With what seems like effortless interplay, Smith's vocals waft magnificently like smoke — that is until it's time to hit.

And hit she will, on the Mary D'Angelo stage. Presented by the Mercyhurst Institute for Arts & Culture (MIAC), Smith is performing in support of *Until We Meet Again* with a 14-show tour. Fans from around the tri-state area should take notice of this Erie date as well, since this is the only stop within an over 200-mile radius.

Beginning her career as a background singer, Smith has toured with Usher, Ginuwine, Brandy, and none other than Whitney Houston, as well as appearing with musician Vonda Shepard (who played a fictionalized version of herself)


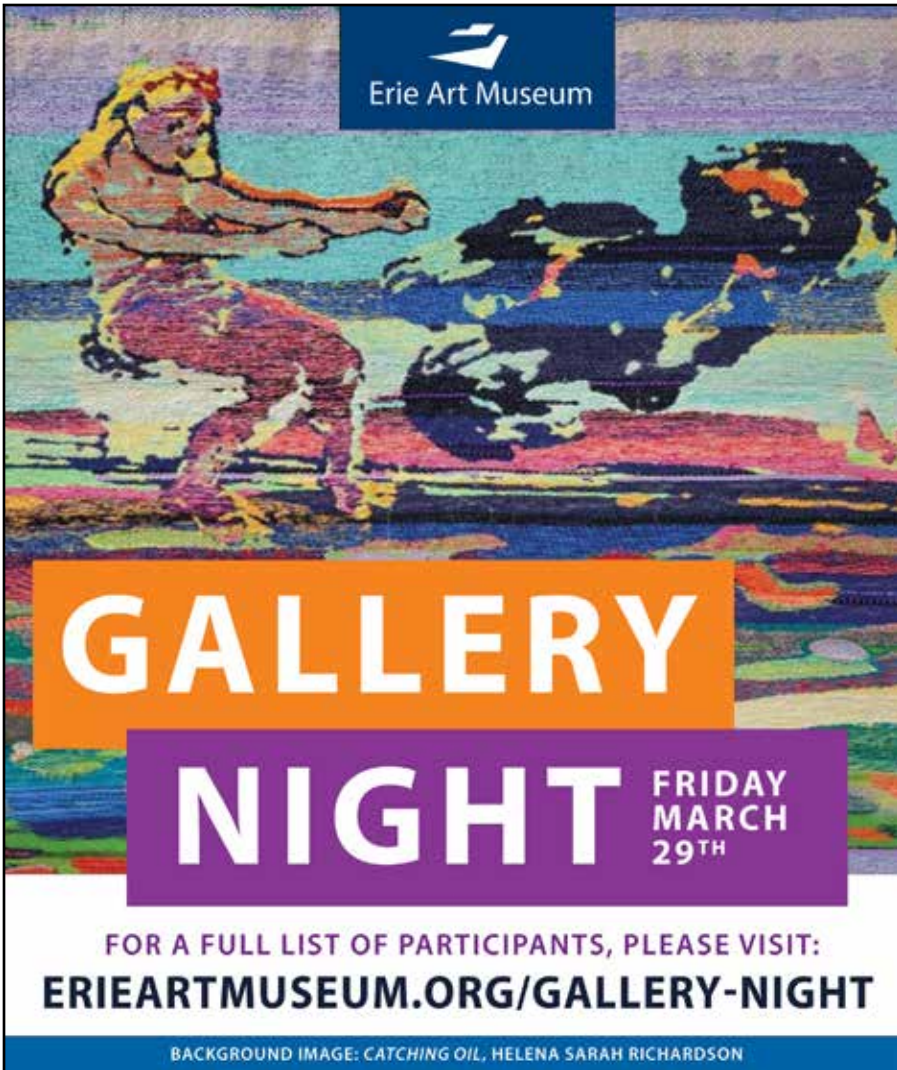


The Queen of Underground Soul herself, Sy Smith, will grace the Mary D'Angelo stage at Mercyhurst University for one night only. Embarking on a 14-show tour, her stop in Erie is one local residents should take advantage of, enjoying a night of world-class soul.

on more than 40 episodes of *Ally McBeal*. She released her debut solo album *Psyko-soul* in 2000, and has recorded five more full-lengths since then, as well as four EPs and guest appearances on at least 27 different albums. Her most recent and significant touring collaborations have been with trumpeter Chris Botti and singer/drummer Sheila E., both of whom make guest appearances on her latest release.

Her current band includes keyboardist DeAndre Shaifer, drummer Chris Bynum, and bassist Dennis Tyrelle Turner. Past lineups have included modern R&B and jazz icons Thundercat and Kamasi Washington. — Nick Warren

7:30 p.m. // Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. // \$35-\$45 // For tickets and info: call the box office at (814) 824-3000 or visit miac.mercyhurst.edu

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What's In The Mail? *Love Letters* at All An Act

An homage to the epistolary

PREMIERING FRIDAY, MAR. 15

What arrives in your mailbox — your physical mailbox — each day? Bills? Junk mail? When was the last time you received a real letter, envelope, stamp, and all? Harkening back to a time before the prevalence of digital technology, A. R. Gurney's *Love Letters* features a simple setup: a man, a woman and the decades of correspondence that has passed between them.

It has been performed by some of the biggest names of screen and stage, and it is now being brought to the All An Act Theatre's stage by David W. Mitchell and Shantel Kay, under the direction of Jess LaFlamme, for six shows only.

While the staging is straightforward, it does present some difficulties. "One of the biggest challenges to directing a show that has characters who are reading letters, is the lack of interaction and blocking," said LaFlamme. "The interaction between the two characters happens through the letters. You have to

create all that interaction in such a way that the audience can feel it and sense it and not bore them to tears."

Mitchell concurred. "In a way it's the antithesis of acting. Acting is about acting upon someone and reacting to them, and A. R. Gurney doesn't want that."

Letters may be an old-fashioned way of communicating, but there is nonetheless a universality to the epistolary format of the play. "I remember finding a packet of letters my grandmother received from a beau she had when she was fresh from high school, and he was writing to her from the service. It was such an amazing read, so heartfelt and beautiful," said LaFlamme.

For Mitchell, family has been located all over the world in past years. "Since long distance calls could be expensive, we communicated by letter," explained Mitchell. "There was a certain amount of anticipation in seeing the letter in the mailbox and opening it and finding out what was going on in their lives."



Actors David W. Mitchell and Shantel Kay will be the only two actors on stage for the duration of *Love Letters*, playing weekends in March at All An Act Theatre. The years-long correspondence between the two characters may inspire viewers to write some love letters of their own.

While letters are no longer a primary means of communication, we are not so far removed from them being so that *Love Letters* won't resonate with viewers — and may, in fact, inspire them to take up their pens and paper and send a note to a faraway friend. — Cara Suppa

Fridays and Saturdays through Mar. 24 at 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 3 p.m. // All An Act Theatre, 652 W. 17th St. // \$5 to \$18 // For info and tickets: allanact.net

Rocking in a Small Town: John Mellencamp Comes to the Warner

Mature singer-songwriter blends grit with hits

SATURDAY, MAR. 16

There seems to be no slowing down for singer-songwriter John Mellencamp as he brings his heartland rock to the Warner Theatre in March. Mellencamp spent a large part of last year on the road for the "Live and in Person" tour promoting his latest album *Orpheus Descending*, now adding 27 new cities to the 2024 roster, including a stop in Erie. Looking at the setlists from this ongoing tour, you are sure to hear classic hits like "Small Town," "Jack & Diane," "Pink Houses," and "Hurts So Good" as well as the return of violinist Lisa Germano to Mellencamp's band. Germano was a member of the band from 1985 through 1993, before embarking on a solo career in 1994. She also returned to the studio, playing with the band on *Orpheus Descending*.

On his 25th studio record, Mellencamp continues to ripen as a songwriter as he ages, with his voice sounding more grizzled, as he veers into older Johnny Cash-like territory. His lyrics still encompass his working-man beliefs, but now feel more frank and outspoken. With songs like "Hey God" and "Amen" you can hear his take on the soul of our country and tracks "The



Erie is one of 27 cities added to singer/songwriter John Mellencamp's Live and In Person tour in promotion of his latest album *Orpheus Descending*. Attendees should expect a mix of classic, singalong hits along with newer material.

Eyes of Portland" and "Orpheus Descending" sing of social commentary like a modern-day Woody Guthrie. The whole band sounds tight, with as many driving rhythms as there are ballads, and Germano shining on her several solos on the record, makes this one of Mellencamp's best albums yet.

It's rare that we have a musician visit Erie that has received such honors, including being inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, receiving the John

Steinbeck Award, the Woody Guthrie Prize, Americana Music Association's Lifetime Achievement Award, and a Grammy (in 1983 for Best Rock Vocal on the song "Hurts So Good") to play at the Warner Theatre. So, don't be an "American Fool," make sure to spend your St. Patrick's Day weekend with Mellencamp and his camp. — Larry Wheaton

Doors at 7 p.m., show at 8 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // Starting at \$49.50 // For tickets and info: erieevents.com

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EVENTS

Science and Comedy Collide in Matthew Starr's *Dark Matter* Show at PACA

Laugh and learn about the total eclipse hitting Erie

THURSDAY, MAR. 21

Experience an illuminating evening of laughs and science as Matthew Starr's *Dark Matter* show takes center stage at the Performing Artists Collective Alliance (PACA). *Dark Matter*, a unique blend of stand-up comedy and scientific exploration, is currently on a national tour aligned with the path of the upcoming total solar eclipse.

In proud partnership with the Simons Foundation's "In the Path of Totality" initiative, *Dark Matter* promises an unforgettable experience. Having debuted internationally at the British Science Festival in Coventry, UK, *Dark Matter* has captivated audiences in top comedy venues across the United States, including New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, and Austin, amongst others. The show explores emotions, relationships, and existence from a wittily astronomical perspective.

"What drew me to *Dark Matter* was in my first interview with an astronomer while I was writing [and] researching the show," shares Starr, the comedic mastermind behind *Dark Matter*. "We don't share a single molecule in common with dark matter, so as a comedian, it's really exciting to me to find that connection and make the audience feel something about it."

Starr intends to present a night of laughter and enlightenment as *Dark Matter* serves as the perfect prelude to the total eclipse taking place in Erie on April 8. Whether you're looking for laughter, education value, or

CONTRIBUTED



Enjoy an evening of comedy informed by science as comedian and writer Matthew Starr makes a stop in Erie on his tour within the path of totality of the upcoming solar eclipse. This unique take on stand-up will be on stage at PACA for one night only.

a little bit of both, *Dark Matter* promises to be an experience that transcends the ordinary. — Aaron Mook
7:30 to 9:30 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$20 // For tickets and info: tickets.erieareader.com

The Year of Trees: National Day of Forests at Asbury Woods

Sylvan celebration takes root

THURSDAY, MAR. 21

Each year, Asbury Woods chooses a theme — a focus for their programming and outreach activities that allows them to do a deep dive into varying environmental and conservation topics. With the beginning of 2024 came the newest theme: The Year of Trees.

If you've been to Asbury Woods, you know that trees are in abundance on the over 200-acre property, making this year's theme especially fitting. The rich history of Asbury Woods goes back more than 100 years to 1920, when Dr. Otto Behrend, co-founder of Hammermill Paper Company, bought 110 acres of land known then as Asbury Farm.

With a background steeped in all aspects of papermaking, Dr. Behrend developed an appreciation for trees and their power early on, something that was integral to the beginnings and growth of the land we now know as Asbury Woods.

But even if you don't work with trees directly, the impact they make in daily life is even greater than you may realize. From providing shade and lowering energy costs, to contributing to cleaner air and erosion prevention, the list of benefits trees contribute to communities is vast.

In keeping with their yearly theme and in celebration of the National Day of Forests, observed each year on Mar. 21, Asbury Woods will be hosting two guided hikes on their property for those looking to get out and en-

ERIN PHILLIPS



Asbury Woods will be hosting two free guided hikes in celebration of the upcoming National Day of Forests. This year has been defined by the conservation nonprofit as the "Year of Trees," so what better way to celebrate trees than with a hike through the trees, guided by Asbury's knowledgeable staff?

joy nature. This event is free with no pre-registration required. Hikes will be held from 10 to 11 a.m. and from 5 to 6 p.m., beginning at the Andrew J. Conner Nature Center and will be approximately two to three miles long. Hikers are advised to dress for the weather and wear comfortable shoes. — Ally Kutz

10 to 11 a.m. and 5 to 6 p.m. // Asbury Woods Nature Center, 4105 Asbury Rd. // Free // For more info: asburywoods.org

Erie Philharmonic Creates Art with *Pictures at an Exhibition*

Mussorgsky's masterpiece paints sonic scenes

SATURDAY, MAR. 23

The Erie Philharmonic will be taking audiences through a gallery of art and music with their performance of Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Adapted by Maurice Ravel for orchestra, this arrangement contains 10 movements, each describing a scene from a painting. Preceding Ravel's arrangement of Mussorgsky's masterwork will be the return of pianist Simone Dinnerstein, as she performs Johannes Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 2.

"This captivating performance begins with Dinnerstein's interpretation of Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 2. Her mastery of the piano translates each phrase into a poignant story, unfolding against the backdrop of Brahms's rich creative tapestry," the Erie Philharmonic describes. "[*Pictures at an Exhibition*]'s grandeur and dynamism will be brought to life in full orchestral splendor, revealing each evocative image that Mussorgsky originally drew, offering listeners a multi-sensory experience that is as vivid as it is memorable."

Although Mussorgsky received piano lessons from his mother, his initial career path was not to become a composer. At the age of 13, his parents enrolled him and his brother at the School of Cadets in St. Petersburg in order to restore the family tradition of military service. In 1858, he resigned from his commission at a military hospital to devote himself to music and continued to compose while working as a civil servant. During this time, he composed *Night on Bald Mountain*, which would be featured in the 1940 Walt Disney animated film *Fantasia*.

Pictures at an Exhibition was inspired by the artwork of Victor Hartmann, who shared a close friendship with Mussorgsky. After Hartmann's sudden death in 1873, Mussorgsky was inspired by the paintings Hartmann had given him, composing the piece within two weeks in June of 1874. The piano suite would not be published until 1886, five years after Mussorgsky's death. French

composer Maurice Ravel was commissioned by Russian conductor Serge Koussevitzky in 1922 to create an arrangement. Koussevitzky was given sole conducting rights for a period of time through the contract with the publishers of the original piano suite and premiered Ravel's arrangement in Paris on Oct. 9, 1922. The first recording of the arrangement was made by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1930 under Koussevitzky's direction.

Brahms began work on his second piano concerto in 1878, over 20 years after his first piano concerto premiered in 1858. Unlike many concertos of the Classical

Pictures at an Exhibition was inspired by the artwork of Victor Hartmann, who shared a close friendship with [composer Modest] Mussorgsky. After Hartmann's sudden death in 1873, Mussorgsky was inspired by the paintings Hartmann had given him, composing the piece within two weeks in June of 1874. The piano suite would not be published until 1886, five years after Mussorgsky's death.

and Romantic eras, the composition contained four movements as opposed to three. Dedicated to his piano teacher Eduard Marxsen, the piece premiered on Nov. 9, 1881 with the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra and Brahms serving as the pianist. It was a critical success, and he would perform the piece often as he toured around Europe.

Dinnerstein, who will be performing the piano concerto, previously joined the Erie Philharmonic in 2018

CONTRIBUTED



Perfect for a budding spring, the Erie Philharmonic will present Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, adapted for orchestra by Maurice Ravel and featuring pianist Simone Dinnerstein performing Johannes Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 2.

to premiere Phillip Glass' Piano Concerto No. 3. She has worked with ensembles around the world including the New York Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale RAI in Italy, the Seoul Arts Center, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. In addition, she has performed concerts through the Piatigorsky Foundation and founded the Neighborhood Classics concert series, which raises funds for music education programs in New York City public schools. A graduate of the Juilliard School of Music, she is currently on the piano faculty of the Mannes School of Music in New York City. — Thomas Taylor

8 to 10:30 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$17-\$61 // For tickets and info: eriephil.org

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EVENTS

Eclipsing Stars Family Day Offers Stellar Celebration of Space

FEED Media Arts latest immersive exhibit inspired by Afro-mythology

SATURDAY, MAR. 30

FEEED Media Arts is hosting a family day event as part of programming for their latest projection-based art exhibition, *Eclipsing Stars*. Erie-based artist Alex "Ionesav" Staley and astrophysicist and folklorist Moiya McTier brought the immersive exhibit to life to gear up for the solar eclipse on April 8.

Eclipsing Stars is the debut exhibition of FEED Media Arts Center, an exhibition and work space focused on digital media arts founded by Benton Bainbridge in 2022. The cosmic exhibition expands throughout seven rooms detailing the stories of mythologies based on seven star-inspired goddesses.

"The goddesses teach lessons — they're quirky and funny — and they have really compelling stories to tell," curator Liz Slagus said. "They're meant to take you on a journey through an alternate universe and explain eclipses through their different perspectives."

Eclipsing Stars Family Day is part of programming for locals to prepare and celebrate the solar eclipse. Staley will lead a tour throughout the exhibition, along with demonstrations from local artists and designers. Attendees of the program will receive a free pair of viewing glasses for the eclipse and have the opportunity to create their own viewing stations.

Staley and McTier were inspired by Afro-mythology to share the stories of the universe "that are not meant

to be hidden away, accessible only to scientists and high-powered telescopes. This exhibition was inspired by the idea of creating an Afro-futuristic mythology that both served as representation to Black Americans as they exist today but also describes deep sciences surrounding eclipses," Staley explained.

The exhibition was made possible by the "In The Path

Eclipsing Stars is the debut exhibition of FEED Media Arts Center, an exhibition and work space focused on digital media arts founded by Benton Bainbridge in 2022. The cosmic exhibition expands throughout seven rooms detailing the stories of mythologies based on seven star-inspired goddesses

of Totality" initiative led by the Simons Foundation, Slagus said. The programming is focused on communities along the 115-mile-wide path that have fewer science engagement opportunities. The Simons Foundation is supporting museums, cultural centers, festivals, rural engagement hubs, and other organizations stretch-

FEED MEDIA ARTS



FEED Media Arts will host art-lovers of all ages to enjoy their latest projection-based art exhibition entitled *Eclipsing Stars*. Local artist Alex "Ionesav" Staley collaborated with astrophysicist Moiya McTier to bring the timely exhibition to life.

ing from Texas to Maine in celebration of the historic eclipse. "The show is meant to get people excited and thinking about the upcoming eclipse," Slagus said.

The grand opening of the exhibition was held on Feb. 16. The FEED Media Arts Center is hosting the *Eclipsing Stars* Family Day event on Saturday, March 30. The exhibition will be on view until Saturday, May 27. — Julia Carden

Noon to 4 p.m. // FEED Media Arts Center, 1307 State St. // \$10-15 // Tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com

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To Tame a Land

Dune: Part Two may be too epic for its own good



Dune rests comfortably in the pantheon of great novels that have seen multiple attempts at adaptation to varying degrees of success, from David Lynch's flawed but ambitious epic (which gave us the truly wild image of Patrick Stewart charging into battle while holding a pug), to Alejandro Jodorowsky's unrealized fever dream. But it is Denis Villeneuve who has been most successful at bringing Frank Herbert's vision to the big screen through two epic and beautiful films. Now *Dune: Part Two* has brought the first book to its conclusion, and much like the first movie, it is a huge, gorgeous, and truly original blockbuster whose pure scope may be too much to handle.

After the fall of his house, young Paul Atreides (Timothée Chalamet) is living amongst the Fremen of Arakkis. As he learns their ways and falls in love with Chani (Zendaya), he also plans to organize the Fremen to fight his dreaded nemeses the Harkonnens. But this path may turn Paul into a messiah and drive the universe into holy war.

Villeneuve tries to tackle all the ideas in the novel and, even with the film's immense runtime, it becomes overwhelming. Herbert's main theme (a subversion of the "Chosen One" narrative) is front and center and it is very fascinating, but other subplots feel undercooked. That said, the film is a literal feast for the senses with some of the most awe-inspiring imagery ever put to film. I don't want to criticize it too harshly because it's rare to see big budget filmmaking this ambitious and imaginative, but these ambitions are still better presented on page. Now let's see if Villeneuve



has it in him to get us an adaptation of *Dune: Messiah*.

Directed by Denis Villeneuve // Written by Villeneuve and Jon Spaihts // based on the novel Dune by Frank Herbert // Starring Timothée Chalamet, Zendaya, Rebecca Ferguson, Javier Bardem, Josh Brolin, Austin Butler, Florence Pugh, Dave Bautista, Stellan Skarsgard, Stephen McKinley Henderson, Lea Seydoux, Charlotte Rampling, and Christopher Walken // 166 minutes // Warner Bros. Pictures // Rated 'PG-13'

Truer Than Fiction

May December brings out the best of its director and actors



We frequently hear stories about the lengths certain actors will go to embody a role, either through extreme body transformations or extensive research. But what happens when this meticulous method is used for a true story? How will the people affected feel when their lives are used as fodder for a job? This is the central question that director Todd Haynes (*Carol*, *I'm Not There*) asks in *May December*, one of the best films of recent memory and a new high point for both Haynes and the actors involved.

Elizabeth (Natalie Portman) is an actress spending a few weeks living with Gracie (Julianne Moore) and her husband Joe (Charles Melton) to prepare for a role in a new film about the couple. Elizabeth will be playing Gracie during a time when she had an affair with Joe over 20 years ago. This made national headlines at the time because the "affair" happened when Gracie was 36 and Joe was 13.

The first half of the film is shot in Haynes' usual campy, soap opera style until the other shoe drops and we see the darkness of Gracie's character. Elizabeth's research delves into this darkness at the expense of poor Joe who must relive his childhood trauma as an adult.



Melton does an amazing job playing a man who feels simultaneously 13 and 60 years old, and his pain says much about the blasé way the modern world still often treats sexual abuse and grooming (the film was clearly inspired by the very sad story of Vili Fualaau). Haynes brilliantly lures us in with suburban bliss and classic Hollywood gloss, only to reveal to us that we were watching a horror film this whole time. *May December* is currently available on Netflix. — Forest Taylor

Directed by Todd Haynes // Written by Samy Burch and Alex Mechanik // Starring Natalie Portman, Julianne Moore, Charles Melton, Chris Tenzis, Andrea Frankle, Gabriel Chung, Mikenzie Taylor, Elizabeth Yu, Piper Curda, Cory Michael Smith, D.W. Moffett, and Kelvin Han Yee // 117 minutes // Rated 'R'

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NEGATIVE WORLDS

"LUNCH LESSONS" BY NICK WARREN



Brittany Howard

What Now
Island Records



Brittany Howard's *What Now* is a bold and eclectic exploration of psychedelic sonic emotions. Having proven



herself a powerhouse on 2019's *Jamie*, the former Alabama Shakes frontwoman-turned-soloist announced her second studio album in September 2023 with the record's title track. In less than four minutes, the song highlighted an obvious tonal shift for Howard. Rather than the intimate neo-soul and folk of the prior record, this new album was going to be bombastic, vibrant, and groovy. After three more advanced singles, *What Now* fully released on Feb. 9.

On her sophomore effort, Brittany Howard's lyrics are as emotionally impactful as ever. Feelings of uncertainty, indignation, and crushing desire fill each track. However, the album's sonic shift toward psychedelic soul, funk, jazz, and electronic motifs heighten Howard's tales to the nth degree. Reuniting with Alabama Shakes producer Shawn Everett, the record feels like the duo hasn't skipped a beat. Over grandiose production, Everett highlights Howard's booming vocals with excellence. But he knows when to step back, even dropping out occasionally to place a singular focus on Howard. Overall, *What Now* is a testament to Brittany Howard's artistry and talent: transcending her trademark folk sound, the singer continues to stun. — Nathaniel Clark

Abigail

The Dream Dialogues (A Glimpse)
Self-released



Local solo artist Abigail has released a six-song live album titled *The Dream Dialogues (A Glimpse)*, which is a glimpse



into new material that she intends on recording for an upcoming, new studio album. Abigail shares, "*The Dream Dialogues* is a meditation on dreams and how we process and perceive dreams in our waking lives." This live performance was recorded at PACA on Nov. 25 as part of the ongoing PACA [LIVE!] music series, which was born out of resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Dream Dialogues (A Glimpse) starts out with "Ascending Into Dream Space" which has a late '80s Sonic Youth tonality to it, flowing straight into the song "Floating Above It All," where Abigail plays solo viola over lush tones, creating sounds by playing through various effects pedals. Eventually a melody appears and her vocals slide into the song with ease. The album continues with "Life Cycles back Again...," "Shadows and Prims," and "He Who Finds You In a Dream..." taking the listener on a meditative crescendo of harmony. With the laid-back atmosphere of this performance, these soothing sounds can easily fill up the space at PACA. If you are a fan of composers Angelo Badalamenti (*Twin Peaks*) or Vangelis (*Blade Runner*), then you will enjoy this dreamy haze of aural frequencies. — Larry Wheaton

Anthony Carson

Live in Erie, Nov. 2023
Self-release



Vagabond? Wayfarer? No, Anthony Carson is more of a modern troubadour – a traveling poet, musician, and



artist. With this live release intimately recorded at Erie's own Performing Artists Collective Alliance (PACA) last November, he slows down for a moment to reintroduce himself with a handful of raw, unfiltered songs which are different from the more polished recordings (such as the 2022 EP *Annihilation*) already held within Carson's repertoire. Tunes are delivered to embrace and lull a listener as much as they are to also shake one by the shoulders with urgency. Carson himself makes fighting conformity seem effortless and natural. These four pieces flutter like tattered flags on smoldering battlefields or like gently billowing sails against a sunset. His guitar playing seems as if he is squeezing a fruit for sweet juice. This paired with Carson's vocals weaves an unexpected complexity throughout the recording. The mysticism of Donovan, the social activism of Pete Seeger, and the bare emotion of Cat Stevens all come to mind while listening. However, the tunes ultimately stand on their own sturdy legs. Anthony Carson clearly has a unique vision, and it's refreshing to look through his richly tinted lens. — Melissa Sullivan Shimek

The Last Dinner Party

Prelude to Ecstasy
Island



The debut album from the all-female London quintet known as The Last Dinner Party is remarkably



multifaceted and already one of the year's best. Overflowing with both orchestral scores and indie-pop hooks, it's memorable, ambitious, and expertly done. An exciting and critically acclaimed work, it seems almost too good to be true. It's also raising some minor controversies fueled by sexism and internet speculation. With almost every mention of the band online, there are cries that they're an "industry plant" or a group of "nepo-babies." While these comments can be shut down with facts and comments from the band members themselves, that's not the point. The fact is that this album is simply too good for some people to accept at face value. It's fully-formed, dark, danceable, and fresh. They are embracing their baroque motif through their music and wardrobe, and perhaps understand how to brand themselves a little too well for how we think a new artist should. The music is undeniably solid and layered, with vocals that waver between the histrionic and callous. With standout cuts like "Burn Alive" and "Nothing Matters" balancing each end of the dozen tracks, it's certainly worth a listen yourself. — Nick Warren

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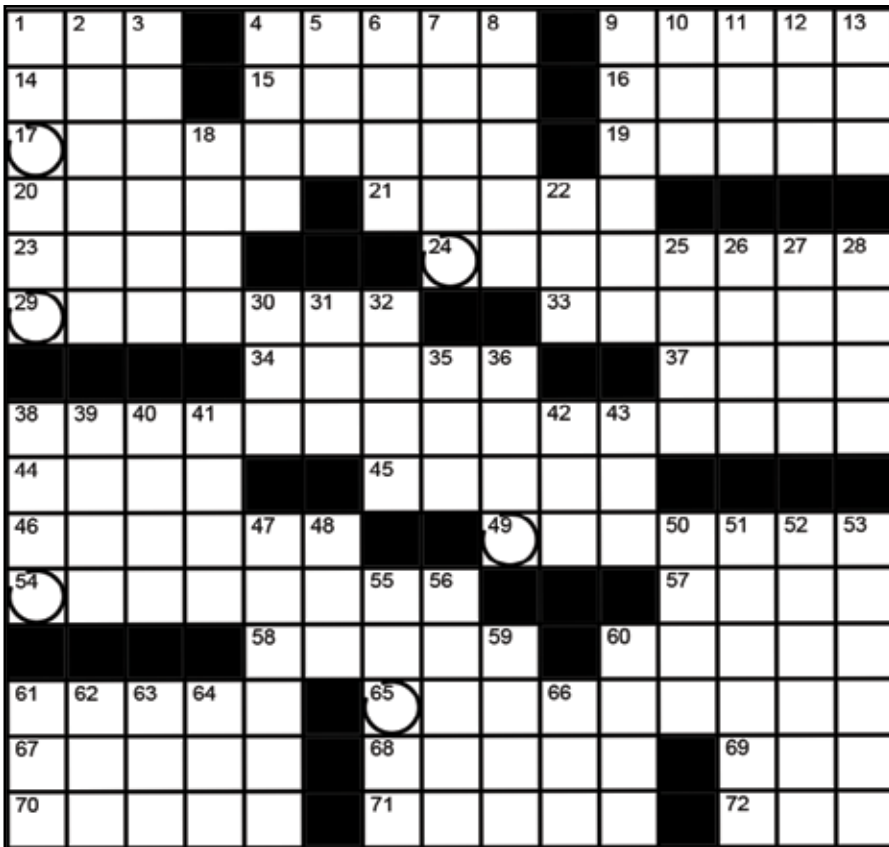
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Across

- 1. Boogie Down Productions member ____-One
- 4. In need of nourishment
- 9. Sith Lord's title
- 14. Part of a giggle
- 15. Cook in a wok, say
- 16. Cinematic playboy portrayed by Michael Caine and Jude Law
- 17. Totally assured, as victory
- 19. Shoes with swooshes
- 20. Has a great night at the comedy club
- 21. Saint ____ and Nevis
- 23. Analogy words
- 24. Stunned
- 29. Robbed of the spotlight
- 33. Piña ____
- 34. Hirsch of "Into the Wild"
- 37. English boarding school since 1440
- 38. Union contract? (or, considering the ends of this puzzle's themed answers, what the circled letters spell out)
- 44. "Child's play!"
- 45. Events with booths
- 46. Jenna of "Wednesday"
- 49. Completely consumed
- 54. Declutter
- 57. "Flashdance" director Adrian

- 58. Site of Italy's Blue Grotto
- 60. It may be slippery
- 61. Lose a staring contest
- 65. Make more constricted
- 67. Terrific, on Broadway
- 68. Indian ____
- 69. Higher ed. hurdle
- 70. Expenses
- 71. Mathletes, stereotypically
- 72. Ref. work that added "essential worker" in 2021

Down

- 1. Casual Fridays attire, perhaps
- 2. Enjoy immensely
- 3. Supply with goods
- 4. What a Swiss army knife has lots of
- 5. Opposite of "yep"
- 6. Dejected state
- 7. Sewing cases
- 8. Complexity
- 9. Scandinavian-inspired shoe brand
- 10. "Baby Cobra" comedian Wong
- 11. Peter Sarsgaard's role in 2016's "Jackie," for short
- 12. Even score
- 13. "For ____ a jolly ..."
- 18. Steady partner?
- 22. Tic-____-toe
- 25. Sch. level
- 26. Silver of

- 27. Yaki ____ (stir-fried noodle dish)
- 28. Breathe quickly
- 30. Fresh, to Franz
- 31. One calling you out, perhaps
- 32. "La Vie en Rose" singer Edith
- 35. Queens airport code
- 36. Lake that feeds Niagara Falls
- 38. Underling
- 39. Steakhouse order
- 40. "Cómo ____ usted?"
- 41. Opposite of "da"
- 42. Paleozoic ____
- 43. Many a population fig.
- 47. Creatures known to lick their own eyeballs
- 48. "SNL" alum Gasteyer
- 50. Fashion magazine since 1945
- 51. "Us" star Lupita
- 52. Defiled
- 53. Took a little look
- 55. "The Jungle" author Sinclair
- 56. Asking ____
- 59. Bob who became CEO of Disney for a second time in 2022
- 60. RR stops: Abbr.
- 61. "Doctor Who" network
- 62. Londoner's lav
- 63. Hypotheticals
- 64. Modern digital asset, in brief
- 66. Possessed



Answers to last puzzle



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Thu 3/14

Long Day's Journey Into Night
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PACA, 1505 State Street

Sat 3/16

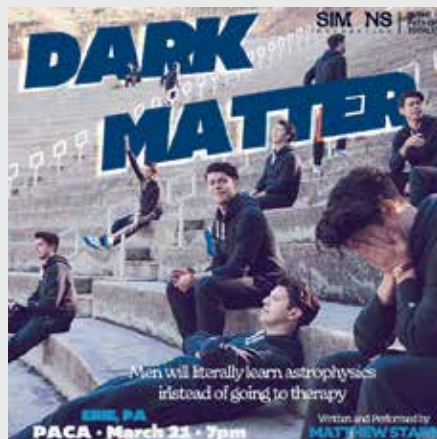
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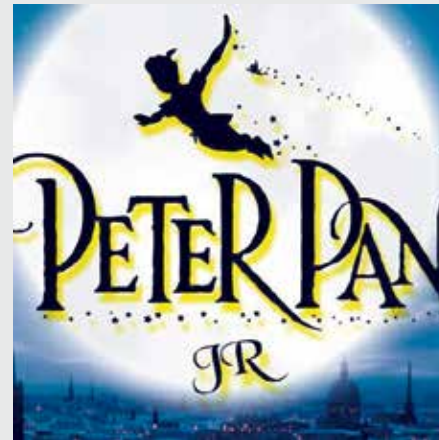
Dark Matter
@ 7:30pm / \$20
PACA, 1505 State Street



Kenny Wayne Shepherd
@ 7:30pm
Warner Theatre - PA, 811 State St.

Fri 3/22

Featured



Peter Pan Jr.
@ 6:30pm / \$22
Cathedral Preparatory Au-
ditorium, 250 West 10th
Street



Featured



Comedy Night at the Bunker : Simon Fraser
@ 7pm / \$20
The Bunker at Lavery
Brewing Company, 128
West 12th Street



Long Day's Journey Into Night
@ 7:30pm / \$20
PACA, 1505 State Street

Sat 3/23

Peter Pan Jr.
@ 6:30pm / \$22
Cathedral Preparatory Auditorium, 250 West 10th Street

Long Day's Journey Into Night
@ 7:30pm / \$20
PACA, 1505 State Street

Sun 3/24

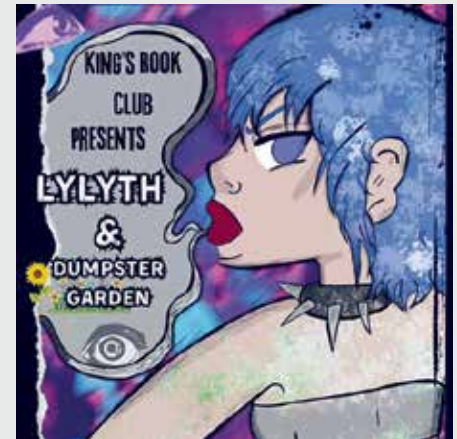
Peter Pan Jr.
@ 2pm / \$22
Cathedral Preparatory Auditorium, 250 West 10th Street

Tue 3/26

Breaking Benjamin
@ 7pm
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French Street Erie

Fri 3/29

Featured



LYLYTH & Dumpster Garden (21+)
@ 9pm / \$5
Mar 29th - Mar 31st
King's Rook Club, 1921
Peach Street



Sat 3/30

Featured



Eclipsing Stars Family Day
@ 12pm / \$10-\$20
FEED Media Art Center,
1307 State Street



Wed 4/03

Trivia Night with Erie Roller Derby
@ 6pm / \$40
The Brewerrie at Union Station, 123 West 14th Street

Thu 4/04

Jim Lang RaceDay Certification
@ 7:45pm
1 Peninsula Drive

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.