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CONTENTS

APRIL 2021

2021 State of Erie Industry – 4

Despite devastating blow of pandemic, county shows signs of recovery

Homing in on Business – 6

Why Erie beckons entrepreneurs back

EDDC Forges Onward – 8

Despite pandemic, the Erie Downtown Development Corporation continues work on over 470,000 square feet of downtown property

New Businesses Survive Trial by Virus – 10

How three Erie startups are making the right moves

40 Under 40 Catch-ups an Antidote to Stagnation – 14

We talk to former honorees Hannah Kirby, Greg Coleman, and Adam J. Williams, Esq.

Stay Local: Two Historic B&Bs in the Heart of Erie – 16

Take a trip back in time at the Spencer House and the Victoria Inn

Khyre Drayer: Threads Of Redemption – 18

Getting to know the founder of 3RD Official Clothing

Take a Drive for Daycation Season – 19

Four day trips in the immediate tri-state area worth embarking on

Business Leaders and the Effects of the Pandemic – 21

Chelsea Curlett, David Hunter, Annē Lewis, Jill Murphy, Armando Reyes, and Jack Sullivan

Creating a Wellness Routine That Works – 22

Why the setup is so crucial to the execution

Prophets, Polygamy, and a Presidential Assassin – 24

Tom Noyes revisits the Oneida community in The Substance of Things Hoped For

Book Reviews – 27

New works by Ann Garvin and Sarah Penner

Our Monthly Podcast Picks – 28

Enthralling audio infotainment we can’t stop listening to

Springing Creativity – 30

The 98th Annual Spring Show at the Erie Art Museum now on display

An Unusual Oscar Season for an Unusual Film Year – 32

2021 Oscar predictions

Local Cartoons – 33

Works by Bryan Toy, John Bavaro, Brad Pattulo, and Tommy Link

Album Reviews – 34

Releases by Maniacal Device, Citizen, Armand Hammer & The Alchemist, and Middle Kids

From the Editors

To bloom or not to bloom?

Is it finally safe to open up yet? Flowering plants carefully consider this question each spring, taking cues from sunlight, moisture levels, and temperature before one gene — APETALA1 (AP1) ultimately makes the call. AP1 gives the plant’s meristems (active growth regions at the tips of roots and shoots) the all-clear to leave leaf production behind and go full *petal to the metal. It’s a delicate decision — bloom too soon and they might get frozen out or snowed on; bloom too late and they could miss out on attracting pollinators ever-eager to help their species proliferate.

To prevent this, plants have numerous fail-safes in place. They possess photoreceptors for sensing both red and blue light, feeding them information about the current time of year and length of day. They pack thermoreceptors for reading both air *and soil temperature, because ground temps provide better grounds for prudent decision-making by virtue of their more gradual rates of change.

For many species, the cooldowns are as important as the warmups. The majority of perennials grown in temperate climates are actually hardcoded for dormancy — they’re evolutionarily *required to chill before flowering even becomes a *possibility. This process, *vernalization, often coincides with the Vernal Equinox — aka spring (aka atmospheric potluck, aka “What even is this right now?”) Of course, in the event of an especially mild winter, vernalization may never happen at all.

All of this is to say that AP1, the blossoming gene-in-chief, is saddled with *a lot* of liability come springtime. Our government and business leaders can certainly empathize with its dilemma. At one or more junctures during this pandemic, they’ve also asked themselves “How soon is too soon?” and “How late is too late?” as they’ve weighed safety against economic survival. For a city like Erie that had just begun to bloom into a new season of progress, COVID-19 was the proverbial spring snowstorm.

Although some businesses have tragically and inevitably wilted away, we’re by and large a hearty lot. Industry, innovation, and entrepreneurship endure despite the current challenges and the obstacles ahead. A cross-pollination of ideas and resources continues between startups and incubators. The 2020 economic deep freeze was damaging to most, lethal or near-lethal to some, and unpleasant to nearly all. But there is a fairly consistent refrain echoing throughout these pages — from business owners both young and old, both new and established, community stakeholders large and small — *we just may be better for it.

Even as it *does become safer to open up, the long-range economic forecast is still a bit hard to gauge. However, we have reason to hope that Erie is a perennial that’s vernalized.

2021 State of Erie Industry

Despite devastating blow of pandemic, county shows signs of recovery



The first couple months of the pandemic were brutal to the local economy, with a loss of 26,000 jobs in Erie County and unemployment hovering around 17 percent. A year later, Erie County has recovered 61 percent of those jobs, although some sectors (retail) have healed faster than others (manufacturing).

and tourism, which accounted for approximately 15 percent of all jobs lost during the pandemic.

In the first quarter of 2021 the Erie economy began to rebound, recovering 61 percent of total jobs lost to the pandemic. Nevertheless, our progress remains just behind the U.S. economy, which has recovered 63 percent of all jobs lost during 2020.

“There’s a little bit of good news in that as well,” Louie says. “The retail sector in Erie actually has been doing very well. It has recovered pretty much 100 percent of the jobs that were lost during the pandemic.”

The retail sector is one of the few that continues to outpace the national average for that sector, which hovers around 84 percent.

Manufacturing continued to struggle throughout 2020, losing approximately 1,700 jobs — or 1.5 percent — to the pandemic and only recouping about 18 percent of lost jobs. Nationally, the U.S. economy has recovered over 63 percent of manufacturing jobs. This trend reinforces an ongoing decline in manufacturing throughout the region. Only Wabtec, the region’s largest manufacturer, remains among the top 10 employers in Erie County, according to reports from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, although advanced industries, which tend to be smaller, more tech-driven firms compared to traditional manufacturing, continue to diversify and stabilize the region’s manufacturing sector.

Emerging from the pandemic, every school district and municipality in Erie County, including the county government, will receive nearly \$300 million combined from the American Recovery Plan and potentially more money from the recently announced Biden Administration national infrastructure package. These are transformational funds that have the potential to accelerate the post-pandemic recovery, in addition to creating new pathways within the local economic landscape. It’s a once-in-a-generation opportunity to refocus regional attention on charting a course for the future of a community that has shown continued resilience in the face of hard times.

“I think even before the infrastructure package the money from the rescue plan already has the potential to do a lot of good for this community,” says Louie. “I’m looking forward to wise and effective decisions in terms of using that infrastructure money and I think it can literally be a significant positive addition to the local area.”

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

By: Jim Wertz

As we swept into 2020 things were, well, status quo. The Erie economy was plodding along with nominal growth, year over year, as it had been for much of the past decade, but there were positive trends on the horizon. The highlights included hundreds of millions of local dollars being pumped into downtown development, emergent investment opportunities in designated areas throughout Erie County, and a significant medical research partnership between UPMC Hamot and Penn State Erie, The Behrend College.

2019 ended with an annual total employment — those who were working or looking for work — of more than 128,000 people and an annual unemployment rate of 4.6 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The figures weren’t record-setting but they were constant, and they reflected the local economic picture for the previous decade, with few variations.

“I think it’s safe to say that things were pretty stable,” says Dr. Ken Louie, director of the Economic Research Institute of Erie at Penn State Behrend. “That’s not to say that we were growing at a rapid clip, but we were moving along at a fairly stable pace of activity.”

Little did anyone anticipate that the first four months of 2020 would be one of the most challenging periods in American history, and the road through 2020 would be long and unpredictable.

The first case of coronavirus was reported in Washington State on January 20, the same day that Dr. Anthony Fauci announced that the National Institutes of Health were already working on developing a vaccine for COVID-19. Over the next two months, coronavirus cases spread across the United States and on March 6, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf announced the state’s first two confirmed cases in Delaware and Wayne counties. On March 13, all Pennsylvania schools were closed with most retail, restaurant, and corporate businesses following suit as part of a statewide shutdown just three days later.

While many employers transitioned to work from home options for employees, others paused or closed permanently amid the uncertainty of the moment. By the end of April, Erie County had lost approximately 26,000 jobs and unemployment was nearly 17 percent.

“The labor force has been shrinking and that contraction was accelerated by the coronavirus,” Louie says. “Just over 20 percent of the jobs that existed in January were gone by April. That’s a pretty steep decline.”

Some sectors weathered the pandemic better than others. Firms performing financial activities retained most employees and professional and business services shed approximately 600 jobs between January of 2020 and January 2021, a mild change by comparison with harder-hit local sectors like retail, leisure

5 Questions with Jordan Fuller:

Director of the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership's Accelerator Program and new Entrepreneurship and Startups initiatives.



1. What is a business accelerator?

A business accelerator is a program that supports early-stage, growth-oriented startup companies through a tailored curriculum, strategic mentorship, and financing through investment. These programs are run for a fixed period with a cohort of companies. The ERCGP program is entering its fourth year and has already made investments into over 20 companies.

2. How does the ERCGP Accelerator support existing industry?

The ERCGP Accelerator supports existing industry by attracting and supporting startups that are strategic to a given industry that operates in Erie. Past cohort companies have focused on manufacturing, security and safety, insurance, life sciences, and defense. These companies have gone on to partner with forward-thinking and bold organizations in Erie from education to government to manufacturing. Each of these partnerships has been mutually beneficial, bringing new or enhanced capabilities to all that were involved.

3. How are graduates of the program revolutionizing industry in Erie?

One example of a company that graduated from the program that is revolutionizing an industry in Erie is CityGrows. Since graduating from the program in 2018, CityGrows has partnered with the City of Erie Government to bring a number of their workflows online – which has increased efficiency dramatically – and recently they hired their second Erie-based employee. Thanks to CityGrows, governments across the country (and Erie) were able to respond quickly to COVID. CityGrows is

being used for sidewalk/outdoor dining and business operations permits, restaurant safety checklists, and relief grant applications.

4. Where do you think Erie can make the biggest splash?

In order to make the biggest splash, it is important that there is intentionality behind the programs that are being developed. Erie has a growing ecosystem of startups and entrepreneurs, along with a support system and partners that are second to none. Erie has a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on the strategic advantages that are already in play, a study for the ERCGP identified 6 target industries that would be able to support new and existing businesses and entrepreneurial activities, those are:

- Life sciences
- High value-added manufacturing
- Food & beverage processing/ Agriculture & aquaculture
- High-value business services
- Tech/Gaming/Digital
- Year-round experiential recreation

5) What does the future of the Entrepreneurship and Startup initiatives look like at the chamber?

While we are not ready to make any announcements yet, there will be an Accelerator program in 2021, and we are working to develop a new series of events, programs, and support systems for the entrepreneurs of Erie, PA. Be sure to keep an eye on eriepa.com for more info in the coming weeks and months!

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Homing in on Business

Why Erie beckons entrepreneurs back



U Frame It owners Phyl Mashyna (left) and Matt Lebowitz have stayed plenty busy throughout the pandemic, with hemmed-in Erieites feeling the itch to freshen up and redecorate home and office spaces grown stale.

In San Francisco, Phyl had worked at a variety of jobs, while Matt managed one-hour-photo shops. He had no qualms about moving to Erie and persuaded his wife to return to her hometown, where he has become a vocal champion of Erie.

Now, more than three decades after moving to Erie, they have no regrets and have learned to pivot their business when necessary. Their shop is no longer do-it-yourself, and they dropped their poster annex, because “artwork is so subjective,” said Phyl. “We just stick to the custom framing.”

The shop sells unique greeting cards, at a bargain price of \$4. When the weather warms up, Matt expects to host Gallery Night-type events at the shop, perhaps in the parking lot on Friday nights.

Dedicated workers are important for small businesses to succeed, and for Phyl and Matt, that key employee is Linda Trohoske, who has been with them from the start. Like them, she understands the importance of paying attention to the smallest details, and she is tactful in walking the line between a customer’s opinion of what they want and what the best choices are for the framing work.

There have been sad times, including the passing of Phyl’s mother, Ginger Mashyna, in 2012.

Their business has also experienced lean years, but the time of the pandemic hasn’t been one of them. U Frame It has been busy since it reopened in May after the statewide shutdown. Tired of staring at their walls, cooped-up Erie people are bringing in items to be framed or are redecorating their home offices, said Matt and Phyl, who also are busy scanning and printing art and photos for customers.

Their business hasn’t just evolved on the inside. They’ve also changed the outside, restoring the exterior black tile the building had when it was Weibel’s Pharmacy and soda shop. The restoration earned them an adaptive reuse award from Preservation Erie in 2016.

Trish and Marcos Digliodo have also been adept at adapting their business model.

The Digliodos were introduced to Erie’s can-do spirit and commitment to collaboration when they attended the Pennsylvania Downtown Center’s annual conference at the Erie County Convention Center in June 2019. At one session, just by chance, they sat next to Renee Lamis, Mayor Joe Schember’s chief of staff. She told them that there was a gap in Erie’s entrepreneurial ecosystem — help for aspiring business owners who faced barriers due to language, education or other factors.

During the mayor’s campaign, “We met with a large number of minorities, people of color, immigrants, refugees and those who were struggling to earn a family-sustaining wage,” Lamis said. “Many of them had an entrepreneurial spirit and an abundance of ideas, but lacked the know-how to start and run a business.”

After Schember took office, his team met with various groups to tell them about the City of Erie’s grant programs and various incubators for businesses and startups. “We were finding that the existing programs in Erie were missing a rung or two on the ladder to success. We needed another entity that could provide some additional information in terms of how to develop a business plan, create a budget, use Excel or pitch their ideas and raise the necessary funding to get their program, project or product off the ground,” Lamis said.

Lamis said she “vividly remembers the energy and the excitement” that Trish and Marcos Digliodo exhibited as they explained how their mentoring program works.

In a phone interview, Trish Digliodo elaborated on why she and her husband thought that their economic development program would be a good fit for Erie.

In South Carolina, the Digliodos sold high-quality wines from family vineyards around the world to restaurants, country clubs and retailers. According to their website, paramountpursuits.com, they grew their business from zero to \$600,000 in revenue between 2010 and 2014. Selling wine to long-time establishments and to new ones, they began to field questions from customers about how to grow their businesses. At first, they demurred; that wasn’t their specialty. But then they realized they had

By: Liz Allen

For some small business owners, there’s no place like home — coming home, that is.

Phyl Mashyna moved back to Erie from San Francisco with her husband, Matt Lebowitz, in October 1988. Phyl’s father, Michael, had died from cancer that May, and her mom, Ginger Mashyna, needed help running U Frame It, the business Michael had opened in 1975 at West Eighth and Liberty streets.

In the early ’80s, after graduating with an English degree from college in Colorado, Phyl had followed her roommate to San Francisco. A native of Manhattan, Matt had moved to San Francisco because he “needed a break” from New York City after his college graduation. When they met outside a club one night, they knew instantly that they had found true love. In Erie a few years later, they would become business partners as well.

Trish and Marcos Digliodo had an epiphany that it was time to return to Pennsylvania in 2014, when they left a wine distribution business they started in Charleston, S.C. to move to Ambridge, in Beaver County, close to where Trish grew up in New Brighton, Pa.

In Ambridge, they opened a business incubator at the former Holy Redeemer Catholic school and church complex. Paramount Pursuits, their economic development business, now has locations throughout Pennsylvania and in

Steubenville, Ohio. Trish is the company president; her husband, who was born and raised in Argentina and came to the U.S. on a tennis scholarship at the University of Colorado-Boulder, is CEO.

Although these two couples own different types of businesses, all four individuals are passionate about buying local, being nimble, and talking up Erie.

For Phyl and Matt, their love of Erie means handling with care the precious items that customers want custom-framed — old family photos, artwork, prints, and even the vestments of Monsignor Francis Robaczewski, the first pastor of St. Hedwig Catholic Church, and an icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa, known as the “Black Madonna,” which is displayed at Holy Trinity Catholic Church.

The late Michael Mashyna, the original entrepreneur behind U Frame It, had spotted a U Frame It franchise on a visit to Colorado. He had worked at Hammermill Paper Co. and “saw the handwriting on the wall” about the future of that company in Erie, Phyl Mashyna said. Her dad, who always been handy with tools and had done some framing on his own, figured that an independent do-it-yourself frame shop, rather than a franchise, would be a hit in Erie, which was already home to nearly two dozen framing businesses at that time, including well-known places such as I. Michael Brown, Fireside, and the Image Gallery, explained Matt.



After finding success selling high-quality wines to customers around the world from Charleston, S.C., Trish and Marco Digliodo returned to Pennsylvania to run their one-on-one business mentorship program, Paramount Pursuits. Impressed with our area’s affordable real estate, they bought a second home in Erie’s West Bayfront neighborhood.

learned lessons that would be valuable to share with others, such as “how to read a profit-and-loss statement,” she said.

But living in a Charleston subdivision where everyone was a transplant, they longed to be back in Pennsylvania, close to family, in a place “where people want to help others and they look out for each other,” she said.

They moved back to Ambridge, bought the former Catholic church property, and renovated the buildings for their business incubator and co-working space. Their first client, an addict in recovery, could only read and write at the eighth-grade level. That client needed more than just assistance in how to write a business plan. “He needed one-

on-one mentorship,” she said.

Since then, they have expanded their economic development program to Allegheny County, Philadelphia, Steubenville, Ohio, and now Erie. In some places, they also manage Main Street municipal revitalization programs, which is what brought them to Erie for the Pennsylvania Downtown Center conference in 2019.

Erie already has a successful Main Street program, through the Erie Downtown Partnership, but the Digliodos welcomed the invitation to bring their one-on-one mentoring program for aspiring entrepreneurs to Erie after they witnessed the willingness of leaders and groups to collaborate here.

Due to the pandemic, their cohort of Erie entrepreneurs meets by Zoom; members also receive individual coaching. Their next cohort will graduate in June.

“I really thank the City of Erie for making this a priority to break barriers for entrepreneurs,” said Trish. Current cohort members, whose ages range from their 20s to late 50s, include a therapist who wants to bring mental health services to clients who lack transportation to get to appointments; a massage therapist; a food truck operator who promises unique offerings; and someone with an idea for Erie tourism, still under wraps.

“I believe that the key to the success of Paramount Pursuits is the way Marcos and Trish design their program to the needs of each client, meeting people where they are at, building a team around them, and providing the appropriate trainings, tools and resources they need to not only succeed but to find their passion, fulfill their dreams and become a vital part of rebuilding our community,” said Lamis.

Phyl Mashyna and Matt Lebowitz have

long been part of that rebuilding. Matt said he is glad that people who want to get items framed can shop local, rather than “schlepping” to the mall. Years after setting down roots in Erie again, Phyl is known for her dedication to Garden Tour Erie (learn more about this summer’s pop-up tours, which start in May, at Garden Tour Erie on Facebook or at gardentourerie.com).

The Digliodos, meanwhile, were so impressed by Erie’s affordable real estate that they bought a second home in the West Bayfront area where, like tried-and-true Erie residents, they delight in our “amazing sunsets,” said Trish.

To learn more, contact Trish Digliodo at trish@paramountpursuits.com.

Liz Allen didn’t have to go far from home to interview Phyl Mashyna and Matt Lebowitz; they are her neighbors. You can reach her at lizallenerie@gmail.com.

Library can help your business, too

Trish Digliodo, president of Paramount Pursuits, credits many Erie leaders for the decision she and her husband, Paramount Pursuits CEO Marcos Digliodo, made to expand in Erie.

Those leaders include Rachel Stevenson, programming director for the Erie County Library, which is part of the Beehive Network and helps entrepreneurs in a variety of ways.

“We offer them support when they want to learn to construct something, whether that is by 3D printing, cutting it with a vinyl cutter or Cricut, or producing music, videos, or podcasts in our media lab. We also have photography equipment so entrepreneurs can take good quality shots of items they’d like to sell or use to seek investment in their companies,” said Stevenson.

The library’s CO-STARTERS program offers two one-day workshops and two 10-week courses. The “Get Started” workshop is for people who want to decide if they are ready to start a business. “Refocus” is for business owners who might need to rethink their structure, delivery methods, or other things due to a variety of circumstances, including the impact of COVID-19.

The 10-week courses build on the workshops, she said. “The ‘CORE Cohort’ takes you through the process of starting a business and has practical advice for both product- and service-based industries, while ‘Rebuild’ teaches businesses to change their tactics to survive in an ever-changing business market,” said Stevenson.

The library caters to “kitchen table” businesses, she said. “They are the businesses that might not be huge into technology or innovation but are needed just as much. They could be a jewelry line, a clothing store, a photography business, or a human resources business you run from your kitchen table.”

She continued: “In the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Erie, the Erie County Library gets you started. Paramount Pursuits gives you one-on-one attention to succeed, and the Small Business Development Center is there to help you through the whole process as you continue to grow. It’s a really lovely ecosystem and each entity has its own part to play in keeping Erie’s economic development bright by helping to create new businesses. All three together are a powerful force for any entrepreneur getting started.”

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EDDC Forges Onward

Despite pandemic, the Erie Downtown Development Corporation continues work on over 470,000 square feet of downtown property



Construction zones, like this one on the 400 block of State Street, have become a common sight in the vicinity of Perry Square as the Erie Downtown Development Corporation's Phase 1 Development Initiative forges ahead.

just over 25,000 square feet (5 percent) allotted for restaurants and entertainment spaces, and 39,513 square feet for assembly spaces (another 8 percent).

Over 129,000 square-feet (28 percent) of the development space will house a garage. Obscured from street-level sight to accommodate parking in the downtown, the move caters to Erie's drive-to-it-and-park-by-it mentality without taking up prime visible real estate.

The remaining 28 percent of the 477,000-plus square feet will become office and supply space.

Some of the work so far has been cosmetic. Much more has been down-to-the-studs renovations (think: dealing with sewage ponds collecting in basements). While some of Downtown Erie lost its character during development in the past, Persinger says the team is working to keep as much of the look of the area in the EDDC footprint as possible to "preserve the historic integrity of these buildings."

Persinger says the work underway thus far is being driven by answering three questions: "How can we do work that's transformational? How do we give people an experience in the downtown area that they can't get in any other city in the world? And how do we bring the community together?"

He answers, in part, saying that the group doesn't want to replicate the big-box-store feel already present in Erie and the cookie-cutter model found nationwide, from Charleston, W. Va. to Sioux Falls, S.D. to San Bernardino, Calif., and nearly everywhere in between. "We want to showcase the best of Erie's local businesses because we feel that gives people a reason to want to come to the downtown area," he says.

He adds that EDDC is designed to take on these challenging projects in working towards the long-term revitalization of the region, which Nicole Reitzell, EDDC's vice president of community engagement reaffirms.

"I think the story that isn't often told

By: Ben Speggen

Three years ago on a late February morning, a group gathered in the multipurpose room of the Erie Art Museum. The announcement of the Erie Downtown Development Corporation's hiring of its chief executive officer was being made.

Local attorney John Persinger became a household name throughout the region with his bid to become the first Republican mayor of Erie since 1965, drawing national attention as his campaign picked up serious momentum within our Democratic stronghold. He did not pull off the upset, but just three months after the election, he took to the stage in his transition from being known as a candidate to becoming a CEO.

"First thing's first, I want to sit down with the Board," he said on stage. "We'll prioritize what we'll be working on, what our agenda is going to be not only for the short-term but for the long-term, because this is really focused on the long-term success of Erie in transforming the downtown core so that we can have long-term success for the region."

In the three years between that announcement and today, the ongoing developments through the EDDC

downtown footprint have been covered extensively in the pages of this publication and throughout all of Erie's media outlets. Studies have been conducted, strategic plans proposed, funds raised, properties acquired, construction begun and continuing, tenants relocated, new tenants announced, public debates and community discussions over what development in Erie could and should look like, and more.

And a pandemic.

But while the pandemic's impact has been more pronounced in other economic sectors, its interruption hasn't proven to be as disruptive to the EDDC's timeline for development. In the early days of the governor-mandated restrictions in March 2020, construction was brought to a six-week halt and the disruptions to the global supply chain did impact the procurement of equipment and supplies, but overall plans remained largely on schedule.

But before the pandemic, the proposed plan for progress was more plodding and less pushing than Persinger preferred. After a consulting firm drafted an initial strategic plan, they recommended a steady, cautious approach. Start small. Notch some early wins. Develop properties one at a time.

"When [the EDDC team was] hired, we took a look at that plan and said, 'This

is going to take us 20, 25, 30 years just revitalize a small part of downtown,'" he says. "And downtown doesn't have 20, 25, 30 years to wait. We need to do something bigger, we need to do something bolder, we need to shock the market back to life today, because we may not have it tomorrow."

"We were on life support," adds Matthew Wachter, EDDC's vice president of finance and development.

That bigger, bolder, shock-the-market approach is the Phase 1 Development Initiative, the work occurring on 12 properties spread across three blocks: North Park Row, State and Fifth streets west, and State and Fifth streets east. That ongoing construction is happening with the hands of nearly 200 workers from throughout the region, according to Persinger.

More than 470,000 square feet of redevelopment is underway on commercial and residential space. For the latter, more than 150 units will be brought online — 57 studio, 86 one-bedroom, and 11 two-bedroom units, accounting for more than 111,000 square feet, or 23 percent, of the development, occupying the second floors and upwards.

Ground-level commercial space takes up 21 percent of the buildout. Nearly 37,000 square feet (8 percent of the footprint) is going to first-floor retail, with



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An artist's rendering of the EDDC's reimagined North Park Row, which will feature apartments, retail space, and the much-anticipated Flagship City Food Hall.

Community Engagement Council, a group of 25 folks — from those currently residing in the EDDC's footprint, to city administration officials, to community activists. Prior to the pandemic, the group was convening regularly for coffee chats, but with in-person gatherings restricted during the pandemic, the feedback sessions have had to pivot to socially-distanced alternatives.

One thing that did emerge from those conversations: The need for a grocery store. And a need to have that grocery store be accessible and affordable to the entire population. The downtown location satisfies the first, and according to Reitzell, the EDDC is working to ensure the grocer and other vendors will accept SNAP.

As he looks back on EDDC's Phase 1 Development Initiative, Persinger says it will have resulted in: \$100 million-plus of total investment; 477,000 total square feet of revitalized and new space; eight historic properties preserved; 100,000 square feet of new commercial space; 25-plus new businesses; 300-plus new jobs; 140-plus new residential units; a 340-space parking garage; new programming and activities throughout downtown; as well as new public artwork.

Persinger adds that of that total investment, not a single taxpayer dollar has been used. Wachter adds that the EDDC, while a nonprofit, is paying real estate property taxes on all the properties it's acquired.

"We are a completely private entity, but we've been very public and transparent," Persinger says, referencing Reitzell's role in community engagement.

Thus, development has occurred, and the development continues still. So does the ability for conversations. There's April's Whole Foods discussion still yet to be had. And with much work done but much still left ahead to do, there's opportunity and space for the community to continue weighing in on the future of Erie's downtown and what it could and should be.

Ben Speggen can be reached on Twitter @BenSpeggen and via email at bspeggen@eriereader.com

is how our organization is not at all a typical developer," she says. "We were formed as a nonprofit organization for a reason."

She cites the Flagship City Food Hall and proposed grocery market, which continues to generate a buzz about Erie's downtown. Discussions for the latter are underway with Erie's Whole Foods Co-op, with its board discussing the move to downtown — a USDA recognized food desert — later this month.

According to Wachter, the valuation of that property, after \$25 million injected in investment, comes to \$7 million — a return on investment not many developers would have the patience to tolerate. To Reitzell, that's important for people to be aware of when it comes to considering and understanding EDDC's role in the development process.

"Sometimes people look at the work downtown, they might think in the back of their head that somebody is getting rich off of this. Well, we certainly hope that somebody does get rich and that there are great economic benefits to this, but not to the [EDDC team] or to our board."

Instead, she cites Natasha Pacely, whose A Taste of Love Southern fusion business will occupy one of the nine stalls in the food hall and who was previously operating out of the Booker T. Washington community center.

"Now she has the opportunity to come and really grow her business into what she wants it to be," Reitzell says. "I could see her opening a restaurant in the next five to 10 years if I were to guess. But that is where the economic opportunity really lies is with the people who can start and grow businesses and get jobs within

this footprint."

Wachter says this non-traditional approach to development came as "outside-the-box thinking" when traditional methods presented more "difficult obstacles to overcome" or "weren't available or appropriate." But local investors — those willing to be first movers in a challenging investment market give confidence to others. That, Wachter points out, has been the over \$27 million initially raised for the Erie Equity Fund, reported on thoroughly in the early days of the EDDC's launch.

Wachter cites a piece written in April 2019 in the Financial Times by renowned urbanist and Director of the Nowak Metro Finance Lab at Drexel University Bruce Katz, who's no stranger to Erie. In it, Katz claims that "the U.S. doesn't have a capital problem; it has an organizational problem," then rhetorically asking: "So how can capital flows be rewired to reverse the export of wealth?"

For Erie, Wachter explains, a way to answer that question of rewiring is the EDDC, encouraging and securing local investment in local development to pave a smooth road for outside investment to travel into the region.

"That first-mover aspect of this is a really essential component to everything that we're doing, because it's allowed us to get in to acquire this property and to do the really hard work of development to understand what we've acquired — how the buildings can be developed, what that means from a financial perspective in order to at least break even," he says. "And in many ways, that's what we're going for."

Aside from delaying construction, another disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic has been to the

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New Businesses Survive Trial by Virus

How three Erie startups are making the right moves



(clockwise from top left) Pastor Curtis Jones Sr., co-owner of Chippers Seafood and Southern Fusion, stands beside his son Pastor Curtis Jones Jr., a former Erie City Council member; smiling customers await their paninis at the Hot Off the Press food truck; blessed with stunning views, Oliver's Rooftop Restaurant expects fuller dining rooms as COVID-19 restrictions are eased; Vintage Soul and Home in the West Erie Plaza was inspired by co-owner Maria Gartrell's career in real estate.

By: Rebecca Styn

Across the country, the pandemic forced hundreds of thousands of small businesses to close. For those that were able to persevere, the last year brought unimaginable economic consequences. But even through this, some started anew. Entrepreneurs already innately embrace risk — and for many, this was just one more obstacle to overcome.

“The pandemic highlighted Erie’s grit and determination to make things work,” described Lesley Ridge Allen, vice president of Business Engagement for the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership. “Over the last year, many businesses in the region used the pandemic to be bold, diving into verticals, taking risks, or finally executing ideas that have been on the backburner.” Ridge noted that “It’s cliché, but for Erie business owners, where there is a will, they have found a way to engage existing customers, grow their business, and learn along the way.”

Chippers Seafood and Southern Fusion

Chippers Seafood and Southern Fusion opened August 22 — right in the middle of the pandemic. The restaurant is located in the heart of Downtown Erie at 1023 State St. and is owned by Pastor Curtis Jones Sr. and his wife Vickie. It is known for its seafood offerings alongside many Southern classics.

“The inspiration for Chippers came from a friend of mine who has owned a couple of restaurants over the years and wanted to do something in Erie,” Jones tells me. “I thought it was a good idea, but it took time to materialize.” The group found their location and signed the contract back in February. “March is when COVID-19 hit, but we were locked in at that time. We had originally planned to open no later than April.” Although not ideal, the situation did provide some relief. “We had a lot of work to do at our location, and that gave us time to work at our own pace. No rush, no deadline, and to get it the

way we wanted it to be.”

Jones notes that not much will change with restrictions having loosened earlier this month. “We can only seat so many inside [capacity is 22], so we will continue to focus on the takeout. One of our goals is a takeout window — eventually opening after hours.” They hope to add that sometime this summer.

They also never let anyone go. “We tried to keep everyone that started with us initially.” The biggest reward for them? The community. “The response of the people coming out and supporting us. During our first few days we had people down the block, around the corner. We didn’t know what to expect. We hoped things would go well — but we were overwhelmed. That was a highlight.”

Hot Off the Press

The newest food truck in town gets its inspiration from beyond the city desk. Hot Off the Press creates gourmet

paninis (and other offerings) that are, as the name suggests, freshly printed (created) and piping hot off the press.

“The idea came a long time ago,” owner Kristian Young tells me. “I realized that I wanted to be the CEO of my own brand — the one that decided what is a good idea, how customers should be served, and employees should be treated. Working for a large corporation you really don’t have the freedom to decide those things.”

Young had planned on buying a truck at the beginning of 2020. “But then the shutdown happened, and I decided I was going to start from scratch and spend time researching and developing the best ways possible to do this.”

The name came on a whim. “I thought it was a one-off — a newsie scene panini truck — but the more I thought about it, how nobody’s doing it, and how nobody’s doing it like this — I thought it was a good idea. We made it a central focus.”

The group started with some pop-ups in November to conduct research and development. “We officially launched the week of St. Patty’s Day with Altered State. Since then, we’ve been working with distilleries, breweries, wineries, and meaderies.” The group will have their own pop ups at independent locations as well. “We plan to stay relatively local and use local sustainable options as much as possible.”

They even weathered the storm of being a mobile kitchen. “Sometimes you have to disagree with Mother Nature. I think a bigger upside is we have a game plan in place for the future. Even if this all happens again, we can still operate safely. We have that benefit.”

Vintage and Soul Home

Vintage and Soul Home is a furniture, home decor, and gift store located in the West Erie Plaza and the inspiration of

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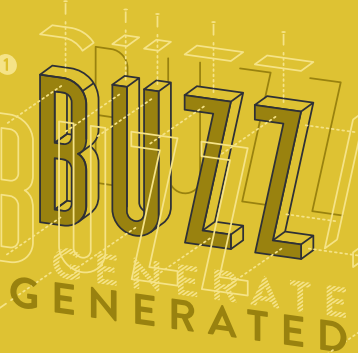
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Maria Gartrell, the store's co-owner and lead designer.

Gartrell has spent much of her career in real estate, but over the years many individuals noticed her eye for design and asked her for help with their homes. "I was doing this on the side and my sister once asked if I was doing this all for free. And at the time I was." Her sister suggested creating a website to showcase a portfolio of Maria's work.

"We then decided we were going to do a couple of pop-up shops. And it was from there we decided to do a retail space. At the time I wanted to use some types of furniture that wouldn't ship residential, so I needed to have a commercial space." And it's truly a family affair. "I'm a partner with my sister Ann who also oversees marketing — and our other sister is the manager."

The store officially opened November 28. "It was a challenge. Early on vendors wouldn't ship to states that were closed down. We found it was hard to get the items for the store. The construction was also shut down for a couple of months."

Even through this, the store has seen steady business since they opened. "We

are quicker than a lot of other places — all custom furniture can come in within 10-12 weeks. We have over 400+ fabrics to choose from. We have seen also that things are starting to pick up — getting things a little bit sooner. Usually, our wait time is 90-120 days. But it's getting better."

They also source for free. "If somebody comes into the store and wants a specific piece, we will find it and give them options and they can order from us. We do a lot of custom work and home consultations because it gives us an idea of style and feel of home and we can suggest what would look best. We work with specific contractors, painters, and furniture makers as well."

For Gartrell, this was a natural extension of what she already knew. "I really felt like there was a need to have another place in Erie where you could get furniture and home décor. That's why I did it. I love real estate. It goes hand in hand. And I made a business out of it."

Oliver's Rooftop Restaurant

One of Erie's newest hot spots is located on the eighth floor of the Hampton Inn and Suites. Oliver's, aptly named in

honor of Oliver Hazard Perry, is owned by Erie-based hospitality group Scott Enterprises. The rooftop bar and restaurant has yet to fully take advantage of the warm summer days and nights in Erie, but soon open-air dining will be available, offering patrons stunning views of the bay alongside a bird's eye view of U.S. Brig *Niagara* in her home port adjacent to the restaurant.

Jim Markham, who serves as Oliver's general manager, tells me that the hotel and restaurant were originally supposed to open in August 2020. "But at the onset of the pandemic, the group had to shift construction focus solely to the hotel as Oliver's was independent."

As such, the restaurant didn't officially open until December 3 — just a few short weeks before the governor mandated them back to takeout only. "Even in that short time, people couldn't wait to get out again. We didn't know what the response was going to be. You hope people will come, but you don't know. We also have the benefit of still being the new kid in town, but the community has been very supportive since we opened."

And the group will continue to imple-

ment all the safety precautions as the mandate is eased. "Even though we will be able to sit at the bar again for customer safety we are adding plexiglass partitions that will be movable." They also have big plans in store for the summer. "We are putting a beer garden outside on the main level. If things go right, it should seat about 200 people. We are hoping to be open by June."

Life doesn't always present us with the perfect opportunity at the perfect time. At times they come when we least expect them. Rarely are they packaged in a nice little box with a bow on top. But like each of these individuals, it is up to us to recognize opportunity when it's presented. Even when we don't think we are ready or during what seems to be the most inopportune time.

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

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40 Under 40 Catch-ups an Antidote to Stagnation

We talk to former honorees Hannah Kirby, Greg Coleman, and Adam J. Williams, Esq.



(from left to right) Past 40 Under 40 honorees Hannah Kirby of Ember+Forge (2014), Greg Coleman of the Erie SeaWolves (2013), and Adam Williams of Rust Belt Business Law (2013).

By: Cara Suppa

Industry, innovation, and entrepreneurship, you say? When have these three concepts ever been more challenging to maintain than in the last year?

Yet despite the many blows locally to small businesses and organizations, the people of Erie have powered forward, adapting and evolving in the midst of unprecedented crisis.

We at the Reader are not surprised in the least by the gargantuan efforts of three of our former 40 Under 40 recipients.

We caught up with Hannah Kirby (class of 2014), owner of Ember+Forge coffee shop, Greg Coleman (class of 2014), president of the Erie SeaWolves, and Adam J. Williams, Esq. (class of 2013), founder of Rust Belt Business Law.

(Responses have been edited for length and clarity.)

Cara Suppa (CS): You three were part of the class of 2013 or 2014 — seven or eight years ago! Catch us up — what's new for you professionally? What have you been up to since those faraway days?

Hannah Kirby (HK): Ha! Sometimes it feels like a lifetime ago! It wasn't too long after that issue that I started thinking about a change. I wanted to be more connected with our community and started to think about what that could look like. A few years of ruminating led me to think about opening a coffee shop downtown. After a year of planning and another few months of buildout, I launched Ember+Forge. What better way to connect with the community than over a cup of coffee!

Greg Coleman (GC): My role hasn't changed, but a lot has changed around me. In 2015, the SeaWolves went through an ownership change. Over the past few years, we've worked closely with Erie Events to make major upgrades to UPMC Park. Most recently, Major League Baseball restructured the minor leagues, and we had a prolonged fight to keep our affiliation with the Tigers. Each of those changes was a hard-earned victory.

Adam Williams (AW): Holy shit, that was a lifetime ago.

We've better defined our mission: We help small businesses pursue opportunities, create jobs, and improve our economy.

We have been growing like crazy. At the end of 2020, we were ranked the #68 fastest-growing law firm in the country. We were fortunate to have my wife, Jackie, join us as our firm administrator. The year she joined (2019), our firm doubled in size — hiring twice as many employees and helping twice as many clients. During that time, we also launched the Big Cheese food truck. A huge portion of our business comes from prior clients and their referrals. This tells me we are doing a great job for them. The pandemic really created an opportunity for us to grow stronger relationships with our clients and help them in bigger ways.

CS: So let's tackle the big spiky fuzzball in the room — COVID-19. It has presented challenges I don't think any of us could have imagined in our lifetimes, and it has disrupted nearly every aspect of life and work here in Erie. We're a year in now; how have you

adapted?

HK: It's been a weird year for sure. When COVID first reared its head, our team reacted pretty quickly and moved to takeout only before it was mandated. At one point, we shut down even takeout and opted for delivery only, which was incredibly challenging as we were down to a skeleton crew (then assistant manager Heather Rapp and myself). But being flexible allowed us to move through the toughest weeks and bring back our full crew.

GC: Minor League Baseball (MiLB) was hit hard. We had to sustain for more than 19 months without substantial income. Once we were allowed, we safely brought people back to the ballpark for movies and amateur baseball. We've also had to examine each area of the business to see how and where resources can be applied to add safety and efficiency.

AW: We made the transition to virtual work almost immediately. This meant we could focus on what we do best: helping small businesses. We've been national leaders in the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) which offers forgivable loans to small businesses.

I give a lot of credit to our team. When the pandemic hit, I gave them the option of coming along on this journey or collecting unemployment. Every single one of them committed to our firm and our clients, even though they knew it would be a challenge.

CS: What were the toughest adaptations to make and why?

HK: I think the hardest part of all this has been balancing doing what is right for the business with what is right for our staff and community. We could have reopened for inside seating, but with cases on the rise at the time, it put both our employees and neighbors at an unnecessary risk. So, we've opted to do service through our walk-up window (an idea that had been in the works for months before COVID!) since last March. I know it's not always the most comfortable option in the rain and snow, but our customers have stuck with us!

GC: It has been incredibly difficult to prepare for the upcoming season. It was exciting when the state allowed for greater event attendance, yet even those positive changes add complications. We'll have distanced seating in the stadium. We'll have limitations on how many players can be in the locker room or on the bus together. The things you typically take for granted all need to be reconsidered and then reevaluated each time health conditions evolve.

AW: I find Zoom calls exhausting. For some reason, they take more work than an in-person conversation. I find it really draining.

Another huge adaptation was with our marketing — I really built my practice by networking and doing live presentations. With the untimely demise of the

happy hour, and other in-person events, we quickly made the transition to webinars and other types of marketing.

CS: Are there any changes which, despite being brought about in the worst possible way this past year, you would keep (and why)?

HK: We'll definitely be keeping the walk-up window for the long haul! Once we're over the hump, it will likely look a little different, but in the meantime, the windowsill will be sticking around even after we reopen.

Being limited in our service this year also allowed me to do something I had hoped to do in the near future — get a job! Managing E+F full-time was never a part of the long-term plan. So, in November I took a position at Erie Insurance on their Next Level Innovation team and turned over the reigns of the shop to our new manager, Heather Rapp.

GC: We'll be deploying more technology this year than ever before. It will play an increased role in ticketing, food service, and the in-game entertainment. All of these changes won't enjoy the same success, but I expect some will change the game-day experience permanently.

AW: Remote work has been great for me, and our team.

This is also allowing us to expand geographically without having to open physical offices. We will be set up at a co-working space in Pittsburgh by the end of the month so we can help clients there.

CS: How have you kept your team/staff — and yourself — motivated and moving forward through this tough year?

HK: Oh, man. I have the best team. Even in the toughest moments, they have really been the bright spot. Oh, and lots of memes.

GC: Over the past few months we've moved our offices, opened a new team store, and secured the long-term future of pro baseball in Erie. Soon, we'll be opening a new, year-round meeting and event space at UPMC Park. The restructuring of Minor League Baseball and public health conditions delayed our schedule by nearly 10 months. Now, it's like cramming for a test, except new questions are being added daily.

AW: I make sure they know our vision: help small businesses. And it's easy to focus on that because small businesses have never needed so much help.

That's not to say the year hasn't been without struggles. Change is difficult for everyone, but we've built a team that adapts to change and can be a source of confidence and clarity for our clients.

Personally, I'm surrounding myself [with those] who see more opportunities than threats and look to grow, instead of finding excuses. It's critically important to surround yourself with people who have a growth mindset. Sometimes we need to look outside of Erie for that, but we bring all of the positivity back with us.

CS: Finally, it looks like there's light at the end of

this dark tunnel — what does a "return to normal" look like for you? And what are you personally most looking forward to when "normal life" resumes?

HK: We're hopeful that we'll be able to reopen our indoor seating at Ember+Forge soon. Getting our daily trivia from Donny feels like the best way to return to normal.

Personally, I'm looking forward to the day when I can visit my friends on 12th Street and sit at the bar for a beer.

GC: I am looking forward to the first pitch on Opening Night on May 11. We won't be at "normal" yet, but it will be a big step. After navigating COVID-19, construction, and the threat of minor league contraction, just opening the 2021 season will be a remarkable accomplishment. We'll enjoy it for a few minutes and then get right back to delivering smiles and memories. We can't wait to have the fans back at UPMC Park soon.

AW: There's nothing "normal" about what we do. Successful entrepreneurs get comfortable being uncomfortable. They look for the change, and risk, and uncertainty, and they jump in with both feet. And we are here for it. In fact, I'd love to see more of it in Erie. We need more of it in Erie.

For more information go to emberandforge.com, milb.com/erie, or rustbeltlegal.com.

Cara Suppa can be reached at csuppa@eriereader.com

Stay Local: Two Historic B&Bs in the Heart of Erie

Take a trip back in time at the Spencer House and the Victoria Inn



ERIN PHILLIPS



ERIN PHILLIPS

By: Erin Phillips

“Stay Safe. Stay Small. Stay Inn.” Vicke Marz came up with this tagline for her historic bed and breakfast, the Victoria Inn, shortly after the pandemic hit. The Victoria Inn, previously known as the George Carroll house, offers gorgeous historic lodging in Downtown Erie. And with a maximum capacity of 20, the small inn presents less risk than larger capacity hotels. Steve and Lisa Freysz, the owners of Spencer House Bed and Breakfast just a few blocks away, also feel like staying small has become a priority for people traveling during the pandemic. “This past year we have seen quite a few first-time B&B-ers, who would have previously stayed at one of the big hotels on the Bayfront, but because of the pandemic, they just didn’t feel safe staying in the same building as a hundred or couple hundred people. Here we have a lot less people, a lot fewer touch points, and it’s easier to keep your distance,” Steve reflects.

Now, after a year living through the pandemic, it strikes me that Marz could add “Stay Local” to her tagline and appeal to the history lovers right here in Erie. While it may not be safe or practical to take a long trip away from home right now, one can take a metaphorical trip back in time at either of these iconic homes and seize the opportunity to see our city from a different perspective, learn some his-

tory, and experience what it was like to live in a grand old Erie mansion for a night or two.

The story of the Victoria Inn dates back to 1872, when George Carroll and his wife, Lavina Clinkenbroomer Carroll, built their home at 401 Peach St. George was born in Toronto in 1828 and came to Erie with his brother, Thomas, to begin a lumber company at the foot of State Street in 1868. The business quickly grew and expanded into a planing mill, producing woodwork and decorative moldings. Carroll was committed to Erie, and each time the brothers expanded their business, George was steadfast in his use of local materials. An article from the Erie Morning Dispatch in 1886 on the expansion of his lumber mill stated that “Mr. Carroll believes in patronizing home industry, and nothing about the mill which could be obtained in Erie was purchased elsewhere.” His busi-

[top left] The Spencer House, located on Millionaire’s Row at 519 W. Sixth St., stayed within the Spencer family all the way up until 1980 with the passing of Judah Colt Spencer. After sitting vacant for several years, it was converted into a bed and breakfast in 1992. [top right] The history of the Victoria Inn dates back to 1872, when George and Lavina Carroll built their home at 401 Peach St. Today, it’s a Best of Erie winner for Best Bed and Breakfast. [bottom right] Preserving and restoring the handsome woodwork of the George Carroll House was a priority of Jeff and Patti Kidder, who sold the historic lodging to Victoria Inn owner Vicke Marz in 2018.

ness was very successful and it stands to reason that much of the millwork on the interior and exterior of his own home was of his own mill’s making. George and Lavina had seven children, they held many large parties, hosted out of town guests often, and took in family as needed. Carroll’s obituary noted: “His home, at the southeast corner of Fourth and Peach streets, was the center of refined hospitality.”

Vicke Marz, the current steward of the George Carroll house, now the Victoria Inn, tells me that the home was kept and occupied by a member of the Carroll family until the 1920s. After that, the home was converted into a boarding house and began its slow

decline into ruin. In the late 1970s the home was boarded up and during that period, a lot of damage took place. It was vandalized and looted, and many of its original fixtures, hardware, lighting, and even some of its woodwork were stolen. In the early ’90s, the home was actually slated for demolition when the Iverson and Laughlin families purchased it together, restored it, and turned it into a bed and breakfast. They ran it as such for about a year-and-a-half, when they sold it to someone who kept it as an office. It then stood empty and for sale for a few years until the home was purchased by Jeff and Patti Kidder who turned it back into historic lodging in 2006.



ERIN PHILLIPS

Many of the rooms have restored fireplaces and trim, one has an antique bathroom with original tile, tub, and sink. Jeff Kidder made custom headboards himself for many of the rooms out of reclaimed antique doors.

Vicke Marz had just moved back to Erie when her neighbors, the Kidders, took her to see the George Carroll house and she fell in love and bought it from them. It wasn't her original plan to run a bed and breakfast, but when she bought the home in 2018, she (and her entire supportive family) dove in head first. They have made the place their own by adding in some personal touches and as the pandemic lingers on, Marz has set her current focus on the exterior of the home by working to create outdoor spaces the guests can enjoy with gardens and privacy hedges. "We want to be a piece of history in the city where people can come and enjoy downtown, but also feel like they are in an oasis in the middle of the busy downtown."

If you live in Erie, you are likely aware of the Spencer House, even if you haven't had the opportunity to stay there. It is one of the most pristine homes on Erie's Millionaire's Row at 519 W. Sixth St. It is an example of Victorian Stick style architecture with some Second Empire influences, including a slate mansard roof, decorative brickwork, and roof cresting which are all perfectly intact. Period-representative details are present in the interior as well, with rich, unpainted oak woodwork, ornate moldings, and tongue and groove doors filling the home. The first floor library has dark and moody black walnut woodwork, with an ornate fireplace and glass built-ins. The home boasts so much of the original it is easy to feel like you are swept back

in time as soon as you walk in the door.

William Spencer, for whom the Spencer House was originally built in 1876, was born to Judah C. Spencer and Lavinia Sanford Spencer in Erie on June 14, 1848. It was William's father, Judah (named for his uncle, a founding citizen of Erie, Judah Colt) who had the home built for his son as a wedding present. William married Mary DuPuy, and after some hesitation, they moved into the grand home (the hesitation was due to the fact that William was betrothed to another woman who jilted him. The house was originally built for them and Mary felt like the home wasn't truly for her. Luckily for all of us, she came around). William's father started the First National Bank of Erie and William went to work for him after his schooling. Eventually William took over the bank presidency and was an influential citizen in Erie for many years.

William Spencer died in 1920, but not without leaving behind his legacy in the form of a home that would stay in his family for another 60 years. William and Mary had six children, and their son, Judah Colt Spencer, continued to live in the family home until 1980. It is a rare and fortunate thing for one family to occupy a residence for over 100 years, and as a result, the original design of the home remains largely unchanged. After Judah Colt Spencer passed away, the home sat vacant for a number of years before it was purchased by the Hagenbuch family, who lovingly converted it into a bed and breakfast in 1992. It has been operated as such ever since. The Hagenbuchs added bathrooms to every room, but made sure that demolition was kept at a minimum, fitting those bathrooms into closets or in hallways

between rooms. As current owners Steve and Lisa Freysz tell me the history of the home, Steve reflects: "It is in such pristine condition. None of this home was a part of any renovation, this is all original woodwork. And that is part of what attracted us."

When Steve and Lisa met, they realized that they both had the same dream of owning a bed and breakfast someday. They weren't necessarily looking for a historic property, but when they came to Erie from their home near Lancaster, Pa. to stay at the Spencer House, they were pretty easily convinced that this was their shot. "We liked what we saw in Erie, we really liked Presque Isle, and the few people we ran into here were really friendly. We came back to stay here again for a weekend in April 2018 and got the whole tour of the home and got to check out Erie more, and we fell in love with it." They haven't had to do much work to the house since taking it on, as it has been well-maintained over the years, but they did finish off the third floor to create a few more rooms to rent. Their current capacity is 16. The Freyszs live full time in the Spencer House and appreciate the mansion and the Erie community more and more as time goes on. "We love sharing the house with the community. We've done the Erie Philharmonic Holiday Tour of Homes, we've been on Historical Society walking tours, and this summer we're looking forward to participating in the Our West Bayfront Porch Fest."

During the pandemic, The Freyszs have noticed an uptick in local people coming to stay at the Spencer House. "We've had a few people from Erie stay just to get away for the weekend. One guest from Erie said to me, 'If I'm off

but still at home I'm always thinking about what needs to be done, the laundry, the yard work, but when you're away from home you can just relax more."

One local Erie couple, Spencer and Jennifer Cadden, have stayed at the Spencer House on multiple occasions. The couple love the historic feel of the inn, and Spencer reflects: "The place was as charming as ever and I would not hesitate to go back. It is an extremely pleasant walk downtown and you get to see the best buildings and churches in Erie. Staying at the Spencer House made me feel like I was in a different time and place entirely. It made me feel like we were on a little adventure through some unknown city in 1913 rather than five miles away from our actual house."

George Carroll and William Spencer were residents of Erie at a time when living downtown was the best, most prestigious place to be. They likely worked together, had mutual friends, and attended each other's parties. They were contemporaries, in much the same way that the Marz and Freysz families are now contemporaries. Both families purchased their respective bed and breakfasts within a week of each other and are very supportive of each other. They are now the stewards of these special old Erie homes, and care for them so that all can enjoy them for generations to come. So, the next time you feel like getting away from it all, consider staying local but traveling back in time instead.

Erin Phillips runs the Instagram @olderieonfoot, an in-depth look at local architecture "by foot, stroller, papoose, bike, and occasionally minivan."



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FEATURE

Khyre Drayer: Threads Of Redemption

Getting to know the founder of 3RD Official Clothing



By: Charles Brown

Erie entrepreneur Khyre Drayer, 28, is the true definition of triumph after tragedy. After losing his father to a heart attack in 2014, the young designer turned his pain into a full-time passion by launching his brand 3RD Official Clothing the following year. The logo of an elephant's head represents strength, getting over death, loyalty, solitude, love, success, and good luck; the two axes placed behind it indicate power and bringing forth success. Well, good luck has definitely been in Drayer's favor considering that he has found himself in some grand situations, such as signing with Snoop Dogg's manager Percy (who is selling Drayer's wear inside of his store in Las Vegas, "The Place"), and working with the likes of Rich Dollars, Shawn Marion, D-Nice, Jason Faunt (the original Red Power Ranger), Blake Foster (the Blue Power Ranger), Rick Ross, fashion director Winnie Stackz, and more. With almost a decade put into pushing his fit, the 3RD Official boss man continues to find his line excelling with no exceptions.

Charles Brown: How was the beginning process when you started 3RD

Official?

Khyre Drayer: It was cool. It took off fast.

CB: Did you have any idea that your brand would take off in the city the way that it has?

KD: I didn't know. I just had a vision of doing something great.

CB: You were into football growing up. What was it about fashion that made you change your mind?

KD: I played ball but I went to school for fashion. I dropped out after my dad died and went to the streets and started my brand.

CB: You recently signed a huge contract for your line. Tell us about the big move.

KD: Yeah, the biggest accomplishment I ever had. I'm finally working with someone in the real clothing industry.

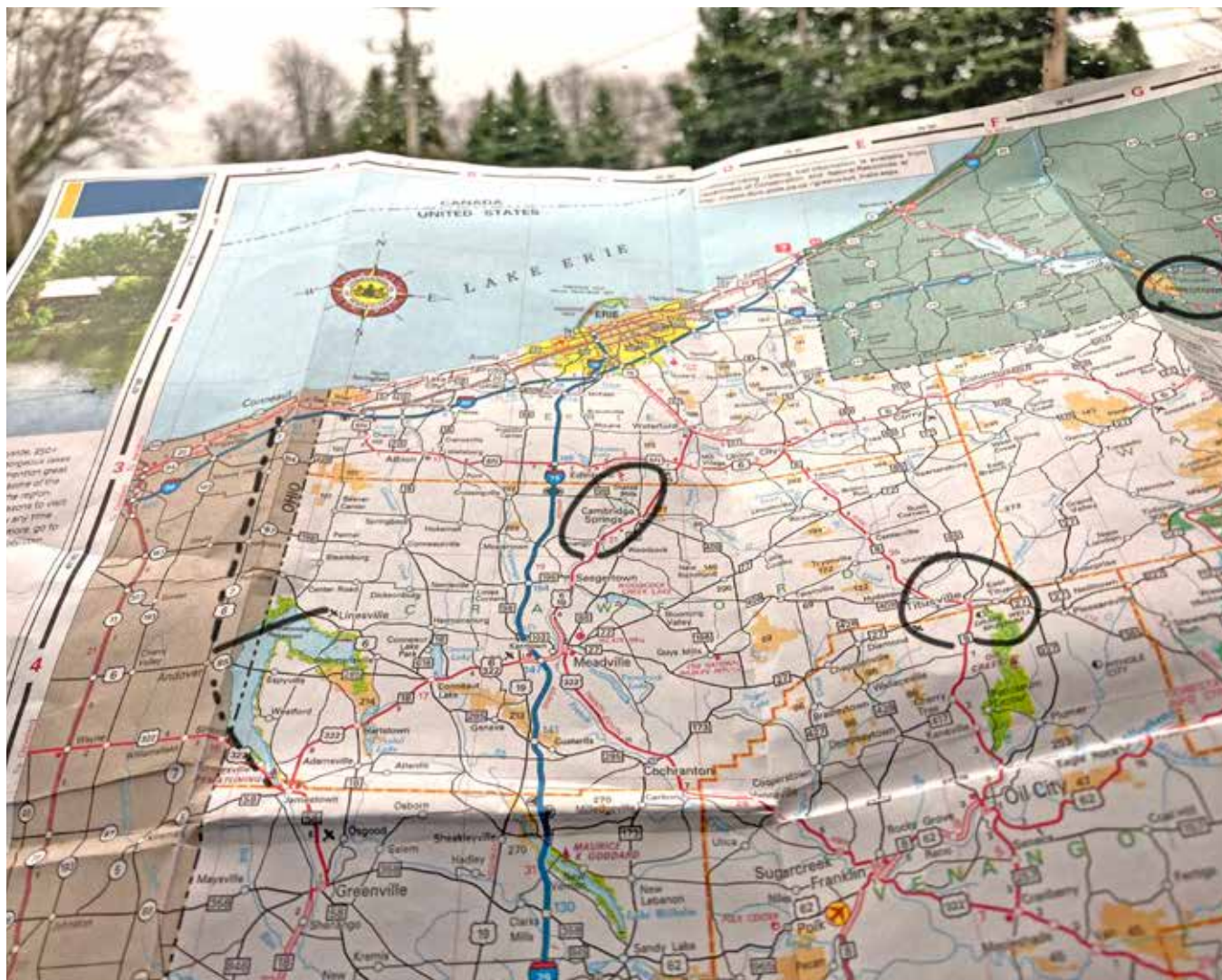
CB: When did you realize that 3RD Official was here to stay?

KD: When I sold hoodies every week and made money for 7 years straight.

You can check out Khyre's 3RD Official Clothing brand at [facebook.com/So3RDOOfficial](https://www.facebook.com/So3RDOOfficial)

Take a Drive for Daycation Season

Four day trips in the immediate tri-state area worth embarking on



As the weather warms up, adventure is just a short car ride away. Our Jonathan Burdick recommends taking drives to the “Pymatuning Triangle” near the Pa.-Ohio state line, the Cambridge Springs-Venango area, the Titusville Oil Region, and the Jamestown-Salamanca area in New York’s Southern Tier.

19th century building on five acres along the banks of French Creek, and it feels a bit like walking back in time as you order one of the finest breakfasts in Northwestern Pennsylvania. Stop in their shop for locally-made goods and before you leave, plan a day to come back in the evening for one of their many summer outdoor events and an impressive home-style dinner menu (which also includes plenty of vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options). If you’re able, bring some non-perishables to donate to their community food pantry.

Afterwards, you will likely want to walk off that breakfast, so strap on your hiking boots and make your way into neighboring Cambridge Springs where there are two easy trails worth exploring: the 3.6 mile Trolley Line Trail along an old rail line path (beginning on Swamp Road) and the 1.5 mile Muddy Creek Holly Trail in the Erie National Wildlife Refuge.

If swinging golf clubs brings you joy, the Riverside Golf Course is under new local ownership with a new fleet of golf carts, and once you’ve worked up an appetite again, drop by the renovated restaurant on the premises. It’s been rebranded as The Rambler, inspired by one of the monikers of the King of the Hoboes himself, Leon Ray Livingston, who published many of his books from Cambridge Springs. If golf isn’t your thing, take a walk around the downtown district and visit Earth, Wind, and Wire Studio and Rock Shop for some locally-made art. Walk across the street to explore three floors of consignments at Walker’s Buttons & Bows and then snag some grub at longtime Spa staples like the Found Lounge, Bambino’s Hometown Pizzeria, or the legendary Hole in One Hoagies. Be sure to pick up some Finney’s Chocolates too.

From there, take a joy ride out into the countryside on Route 408 towards famed abolitionist John Brown’s Tan-

By: Jonathan Burdick

After the unprecedented summer of 2020, many are looking towards this summer with a little more optimism. The pandemic is not over and masking, social distancing, and caution will still be the norm, but as the vaccination becomes more widely available, it is likely that we will begin the transition back to something that feels a bit more like the Before Times. If getting outside of your bubble is a possibility this summer, consider some daycations that you might otherwise overlook, which will serve both as a reminder of the richness of our area while also keeping money local, helping the regional economy.

A Day at the Museums - Jamestown and Salamanca, N.Y.

Less than an hour’s drive from Erie is the Rust Belt city of Jamestown, N.Y.

This well-known hometown of Lucille Ball and former “Furniture Capital of the World” also became the home of the National Comedy Center in 2018 and was named among TIME Magazine’s World’s Greatest Places in 2019. With over 50 exhibits and an unprecedented archive collection, it is a comedy lover’s paradise. Have you ever wanted to see Jerry Seinfeld’s puffy shirt? Here’s your chance. Bonus: It also includes dual admission into the Lucy-Desi Museum.

Hop back on the road and venture towards Salamanca where you can visit the Seneca-Iroquois National Museum, home of the mesmerizing and essential Onöhsagwê:de’ Cultural Center, which also opened to the public in 2018. The center is “dedicated to the honorable presentation of the prehistory, history, and contemporary culture of the Iroquois, with special emphasis on the Seneca” and is an ab-

solute must-visit. Exhibits include Iroquois tattooing, Seneca medicine, and the construction of the Kinzua Dam that resulted in the tragic displacement of hundreds of Seneca.

You won’t have to travel far to find something to eat from there. Check out Salamanca’s Rock’n Taco or the beloved local staple, the Plaza Restaurant — or take a detour in Lakewood on the way home for a bite and six-pack-to-go at Southern Tier Brewery.

Small Town America - Cambridge Springs and Venango

If you didn’t grow up in Crawford County, it is likely that you only know of Venango for golf and beer, but the tiny creekside borough of less than 300 is a tight-knit community whose residents are fiercely loyal to their small town.

Step foot in the Venango General Store, housed in a recently renovated

NICK WARREN

nery on John Brown Road. There's not much left besides the remnants of his tannery, a small cemetery where his first wife and child are buried, and a historical marker, but he spent a formative decade of his life there as a young father. If nothing else, it'll make for some great selfies. Then, if you still have time and energy before heading home, you can travel westward 10 miles to take in the evening scenery and sights at the Woodcock Dam or head east 10 miles on Route 77 to enjoy the natural beauty of Canadohta Lake.

The Pymatuning Triangle

The "Pymatuning Triangle" isn't a term people actually use, but that's how I always describe our family trips around the massive man-made lake. We always start with the famous and strange roadside attraction in Linesville: the spillway. If you've somehow never been there, it's hard to describe just how bizarrely captivating it is to watch thousands of carp and ducks and geese compete for the old white bread being tossed in the water, but clearly it is, as it is one of Pennsylvania's

most visited attractions. Crossing the nearby scenic two-mile long causeway bridge will then take you into Andover, Ohio where there are plenty of food options. There's the hometown Andover Diner (no diners in the Buckeye State), the Bakery on the Square to satisfy your sweet tooth, or the extremely unique Covered Bridge Pizza, which opened in 1977 inside a restored 1862 lattice truss bridge. If you decide to stay the night at one of the many nearby campgrounds, be sure to snag some meat and cheese at the family-owned Piper's Meats. From Andover, you have options. Travel directly north for a 30-minute countryside drive and you'll arrive in Conneaut, Ohio where you can track down the numerous covered bridges or explore the many museums and parks before snagging some White Turkey Drive-In on the way home. Another option is taking the 15-minute drive southeast to explore Jamestown, Pennsylvania and picking up something from Lago Winery and Mortals Key Brewery, or crossing back over the causeway for a stop in Conneaut Lake.

The Oil Region - Titusville

My grandmother grew up in nearby Plumer, so I spent a lot of time in Titusville growing up and the historic homes, the rich history, and the natural beauty of the area have always been a source of fascination for me. If you appreciate architecture, park your car near the historic district and you can walk for miles simply admiring the stunning Victorian-era homes. You could spend days exploring the Oil Region and its many parks and trails and surrounding towns (and, if you want to, you can book one of the 21 air-conditioned caboose rooms at the Caboose Motel for \$79 per night on weekdays). The nearby Oil Creek and Titusville Railroad will also begin operating its three-hour round-trip rides and Murder Mystery Dinners again beginning in June with new seating restrictions. From there, it's mostly figuring out what you want to spend your time doing. If you're interested in the history, you can visit the Tarbell House, where muckraker Ida Tarbell lived as a teenager, and the Drake Well Museum & Park, which interprets the early years

of the American oil industry and the contributions of Edwin Drake (who is buried and has a memorial at the Woodlawn Cemetery). There is also the Pithole Visitor Center, which explores the history of the infamous oil boomtown of Pithole City. Food options include the historic Warner's Bakery, home of the original Smiley Cookie that became the face of Eat 'n Park, Missy's Arcade Restaurant for some classic home-cooking, Orr's Brewing Company for some house-made pizzas and appetizers and brews, or you can grab some classic hot dogs, burgers, and ice cream at City Limits Ice Cream near Burgess Park. Nearby are also Oil City, Franklin, and numerous other small towns worth exploring. Whatever you decide to do and wherever you decide to go this summer, be safe, stay healthy, and don't forget to stop and appreciate the moments and memories. Jonathan Burdick runs the historical blog *Rust & Dirt*. He can be reached at jburdick@eriereader.com

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Take the next step now: Enroll in the Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy!

To apply visit JSErie.org or call 814.459.8000



"While the pandemic has negatively affected many businesses, the mental health field has seen an influx as anxiety and depression rates continue to rise. Although my business has continued to grow during this time, increased restrictions and fears of contracting COVID have changed how I provide service. The switch from providing primarily face-to-face sessions to now doing telehealth has required me to connect with my clients and their families in a different way. The use of traditional nonverbal cues and facial expressions is not as observable on the computer which can create a disconnect between the counselor and the client. In an effort to resolve this, I have worked diligently to build rapport with my clients and create a safe space for them to question, share, and grow." – Chelsea Curlett, Chelsea Curlett Counseling Services



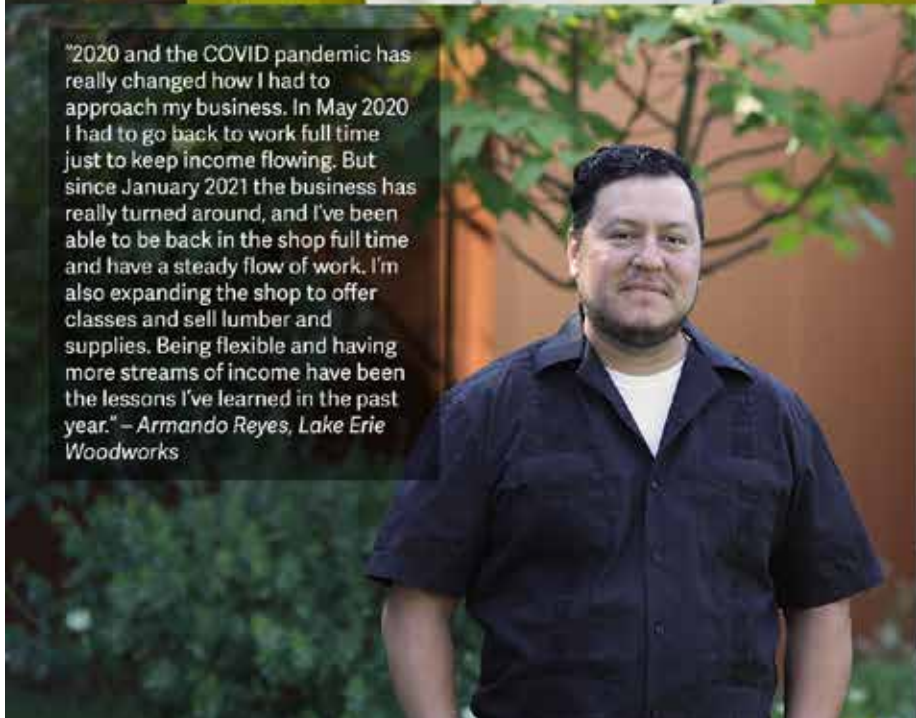
"Like every business, our business has been impacted by the pandemic. To some degree, we have lost contracts as businesses close and cost-cut, but our company supports local businesses in managing their web presence, which has become more important than ever, thereby more than doubling our workload under similar revenue. We've learned a couple of big lessons. One is simply disaster preparedness and having contingency plans for moving workers home. The second is that no one wants to see anyone hurt in a crisis. But whether your business is expanding or shrinking, there is hardship in both, and no one is 'unaffected.' We really are in this together." – David Hunter, Epic Web Studios



"The pandemic has obviously been a whirlwind for all the hospitality industry, specifically here in Erie, but Red Letter has – I think – only grown from this pandemic. We really took a look at all the different angles on how we can better our business, and how we can continue to grow in the community, build partnerships, grow our team, and grow internally. We decided that we can either be upset and sad and depressed about this, or we can take the high road and figure out how we come out stronger. And that's just what we were determined to do." – Anné Lewis, Red Letter Hospitality



"The last year has impacted nearly every aspect of yogaErie, from being forced to close, then to changing how we offer yoga, to the obvious financial losses. Although it felt devastating at times, the pandemic taught us how to pivot again and again, from virtual yoga to parking lot yoga and now back to the newly expanded studio. We discovered we could still offer the best of power yoga under any circumstances." – Jill Murphy, yogaErie



"2020 and the COVID pandemic has really changed how I had to approach my business. In May 2020 I had to go back to work full time just to keep income flowing. But since January 2021 the business has really turned around, and I've been able to be back in the shop full time and have a steady flow of work. I'm also expanding the shop to offer classes and sell lumber and supplies. Being flexible and having more streams of income have been the lessons I've learned in the past year." – Armando Reyes, Lake Erie Woodworks



"Being a small startup in the middle of our buildout phase as the world shutdown was not a great place to be. Small businesses have been more harshly impacted than any other business segment. A situation like that will force any entrepreneur to become more strategic than ever before. That is exactly what happened. We became laser-focused, we made some tough decisions, and pivoted to get Fit Plus through the short term and set us up for long-term success. One thing that is for sure going forward for all business owners and entrepreneurs out there... is after all 2020 has shown us, if you are not prepared for the worst going forward you have missed out on one hell of a business lesson." – Jack Sullivan Owner Fit Plus, IFBB Pro League Int. Head Judge

Creating a Wellness Routine That Works

Why the setup is so crucial to the execution



WHYFRAMESHOT

By: Amy VanScoter

It's relatively safe to say that we've all been out of our routines during the past year. In times when we most need to take care of ourselves with a wellness routine, it has become increasingly difficult for most of us to stick to one. As fitness centers reopen and COVID restrictions loosen, now is the perfect time to start getting back into a routine and taking better care of ourselves. A wellness routine should be tailored to your goals, fit you as an individual, and work with your lifestyle.

It's instrumental that you set yourself up for success. Debbie DeAngelo, RNC, a holistic health coach, suggests three ways to do that:

1. Determine your motivation. This is your why. It's the specific reason that you want to take your life in a different direction. Your motivator must be very strong and meaningful because this is what will help keep you going when you feel like giving up.

2. Anticipate a marathon, not a sprint. Lifestyle changes are not short-term solutions. They are long-term strategies. You didn't get to an unhealthy state overnight, so don't expect to return to a vibrant state of health overnight either. Slowly but surely, you will get there and stay there.

3. Take the time to plan and prepare. In your exuberance to turn your life around, you may be inclined to jump right in with both feet. DeAngelo encourages her health coaching clients to take a few days to assemble everything they require (i.e. food prep and meal

planning, scheduling exercise time, and buying any equipment or clothing they need, etc.) to ensure a seamless transition to their healthier way of living.

Jack Sullivan, owner of FitPlus, says that taking account of your starting point is also really important. "Unfortunately in this day and age with social media and wanting that instant gratification that we see in the pictures, sometimes people set themselves up for failure. A lot of people don't realize that you have to put your body in a position to start building muscle and burning body fat and sometimes you can't do that until [you go through] what you might call a detoxification period where you get those markers in line, decrease inflammation, and set your body up to start working harder than it has been."

Sullivan urges those starting a wellness routine to be realistic and always keep looking at the benefits of what you are doing. "If you aren't happy with the scale but you are finding that you are feeling better and stronger, sleeping better, and your clothes fit better, these are all good markers that you are moving in the right direction. Sometimes those smaller markers are actually the big milestones because they are setting your body up to be more successful down the line if you continue to have the discipline and stay on the path."

Sticking with a wellness routine also demands consistency over time and discipline. "When you start to lose your motivation, that's when the discipline kicks in," said Sullivan. "No matter

It's important to approach your wellness goals one step at a time — and get back on the proverbial treadmill when you inevitably fall off.

what you're trying to accomplish in life, discipline is your key to success and is going to be your backbone to anything you try to excel at because over time, it's human nature to lose motivation. You're going to have bad days and setbacks, and so, discipline will always help you hold the line."

When goal setting, DeAngelo cautions that you shouldn't bite off more than you can chew and to set both short- and long-term goals. "It's really more effective to keep your plan simple and take it slowly. It's better to set one goal at a time and focus on achieving it than it is to feel scattered and overwhelmed by the enormity of conquering multiple goals at once. Attainable goals are as specific as possible and have no more than three detailed steps for achieving them. The detailed steps are the things you will implement every day to get you closer to your goal," said DeAngelo. "Progress is more important than perfection. No one is perfect and nobody has a perfect lifestyle. There will always be splurges, slip-ups, and setbacks. That's ok... it's normal. It's what you do afterwards that determines your long-term success. Will you go right back to your healthy routine or will you use it as an excuse to give up?"

Sullivan says that at Fit Plus, having accountability is a big help for his clients to stick to their routines and meet their goals and can also help get them back on track when they do inevitably fall off.

"When you have people pushing for you, rooting you on, and holding you accountable and raising that bar for you even when you don't feel like reaching for it, it can make the biggest difference. In our darkest hours sometimes it is easier to let ourselves down than it is to let others down, so it can make a big difference to have that support," said Sullivan.

The experts all agree that there is no shame in getting help to assist you in the process, especially if you are attempting to completely change your lifestyle or if you have had several un-

successful attempts in the past. Most people are much better at accomplishing wellness goals when they have professional support and guidance. A coach, trainer, nutritionist, or other wellness expert helps you stay accountable to your goals by having you check in and report your progress and can lift you up and provide encouragement when you feel discouraged.

"You have to do your research and have the right help and the right people around you. You also have to become educated about what you're doing and remember that everyone's body is different. Be clear about what your goals are, and how much time you have to commit," Sullivan said.

The starting line differs by individual. Most people know what is and isn't working in their life. DeAngelo suggests that people ask themselves, "What do I need to do to support my physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being?" She added, "Our body really only requires the fundamentals to function well. Unfortunately, these are the areas that we tend to neglect. The motto that I follow, and use with my clients, is 'Eat right, sleep tight, move more, stress less.'"

"The proper mindset is crucial to any type of change," said DeAngelo. "You can't just desire to take your life in a new direction; you must be truly willing to do so. It's not enough to want to change for someone else or because you think you should. You need to be genuinely committed to yourself and your well-being."

Remember that a wellness routine is all about what works for you. Taking small steps, setting goals, and focusing on living your life with intention are great ways to start. Learning to reduce stress by increasing the healthy activities in your life will have you well on your way to wellness. Jack Sullivan encourages people to check out FitPlus at 2421 Asbury Road and join the Fit Fam. Debbie DeAngelo can be reached at debbie@HealthonHeels.com.

Amy VanScoter is a certified yoga instructor at SchoolHouse Yoga in Erie with a passion for wellness, and a marketing and communications professional. She can be reached at avanscoter@gmail.com.

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Thu Apr 15th	6:30~8pm	Jeff Glover (The Loft)
Fri Apr 16th	6:30~9pm	Paoello & Gone w/ Andy Costa
Sat Apr 17th	6:30~9pm	50 Miles to Empty
Sun Apr 18th	11am	Breakfast with Jesus
Fri Apr 23rd	6:30~9pm	Fred Oakman
Sat Apr 24th	6:30~9pm	Sunday at the station
Sun Apr 25th	11~1pm	Brunch with John & Jeff
Fri Apr 30th	5:30~9pm	Tyler Ripper / Wildwood Express – The Sandbar
Sat May 1st	6:30~9pm	The Moses Morgan Band – The Sandbar
Sun May 2nd	11am	Breakfast with Jesus
Fri May 7th	6:30~9pm	Jesse James Weston – The Sandbar
Sat May 8th	6:30~9pm	Jay Baumgardner – The Sandbar



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Prophets, Polygamy, and a Presidential Assassin

Tom Noyes revisits the Oneida community in
The Substance of Things Hoped For



CONTRIBUTED/SLANT BOOKS

By: Dan Schank

Local author Tom Noyes' *The Substance of Things Hoped For* doesn't lend itself to a tidy summary.

Although a work of fiction, it was inspired by the true story of the Oneida community — an “abolitionist, free-love religious commune from the 19th century” according to Noyes. The founder of this experiment in Christian socialism was John Humphrey Noyes, a central character in the book and a distant relative to its author. Oneida was founded on the principle that if people followed Noyes' theological instructions, then heaven could be present on earth. The slice of heaven he spoke of was in Upstate New York, roughly four hours east of Erie.

In 1860, Oneida welcomed its most infamous member, Charles Guiteau. Mentally ill and prone to both religious and political zealotry, Guiteau would go on to assassinate President James A. Garfield in 1881. According to Noyes, “the novel measures these two men against each other and the supernatural, prophetic visions that they had — how they saw God's plan for America in the 19th century in such different ways.”

There's a lot to unpack in *The Substance of Things Hoped For*. To sort it all out, I chatted with Noyes (a friend and colleague of mine at Penn State Behrend) over Zoom in early April. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Dan Schank: Could you give our readers an overview of the Oneida community and its principles?

Tom Noyes: It was a commune in the sense that everyone was to share all labor and profits. What got everyone's attention was the notion of “complex marriage,” as John Humphrey Noyes called it. In complex marriage, all the adult men could be married to all the adult women. It wasn't a one-to-one, wife and husband correspondence. Noyes saw the Biblical ideal of marriage as a group undertaking.

It wasn't “free love,” per se. There was a structure to it — and there was official marriage — but everyone was kind of married to everyone else. The young men would be initiated into marriage in the community by the older women, and the young women would be initiated by the older men. This was certainly controversial and got Noyes in trouble with the law.

As the decades went by, Noyes started to dabble in eugenics a bit. He started to pair people in his community together to have children who he thought would make interesting offspring. Otherwise, a big part of his vision of marriage and sex was that it did not have to — and in

Dr. Tom Noyes, a professor of English and creative writing at Penn State Behrend, is preparing for the release of his first novel, *The Substance of Things Hoped For*. The book was inspired by Upstate New York's Oneida community, “an abolitionist, free-love religious commune from the 19th century.”

most instances should not — produce offspring. He was a big proponent of male continence.

Part of this was also kind of progressive. He often talked about how women should not have to spend their whole lives bearing and taking care of children. That they were made for more; that they were intellectual beings just like men were. He gave women positions of leadership in the community that were extraordinary for this time. On the other hand, in his personal relationships he exploited women. And there's also some evidence and suspicion that he would put himself in position to participate in the sexual life of the commune in ways different than other men. In a privileged way.

DS: Tell us about the research process that went into the book.

TN: The main thing I did was to read John Humphrey Noyes' own writing. He was a very prolific author. He has some pretty interesting philosophical books, theological books, and political books. He even dabbled into anthropology a bit.

I also went to the special collections library at Syracuse University. You go in there and put the gloves on and you can read the letters — not just letters that Noyes wrote, but letters from detractors, fans, lovers, and ex-lovers. And I tried to capture some of those voices in the novel.

The notion that someone in the 19th century could envision upstate New York as a kind of heaven on Earth really intrigued me. Just the idea that, at least in someone's eyes, there was this geographical location that could be made into an ideal celestial home.

DS: Tell us about the play between fact and fiction. To what degree did you stay true to history? Where did you take liberties?

TN: It's *definitely* a novel.

Most of the characters who I have as my narrators are actual historical figures. And many of the events that occur in the novel are based on things that really happened. But other than that — including personalities, conversations, dynamics, and so on — I fully admit that I took great artistic license in reimagining those relationships and dynamics.

Trying to distinguish between authentic voices and voices that are out to exploit is interesting. The ways in which the wrong kinds of personalities can draw people in, and how public discourse can become poisoned. How something that starts off as idealism can become polluted and turn into its opposite. How Guiteau combined hardcore political beliefs and hardcore religious beliefs and how that recipe almost always, in history, is a recipe for disaster.

The Substance of Things Hoped For will be released at the end of April by Slant Books: slantbooks.com

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I Thought You Said This Would Work

Ann Garvin's newest book proves power of friendship

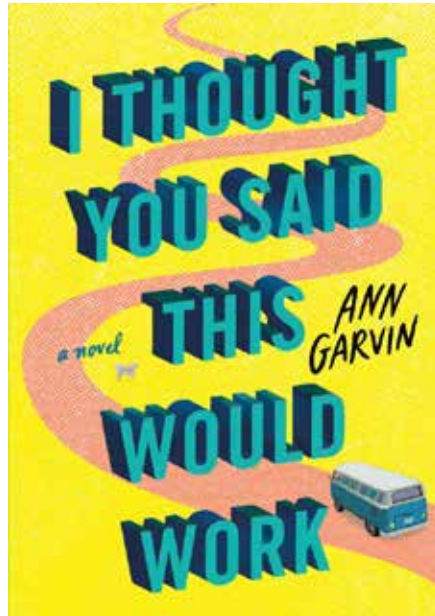
Two former friends who haven't connected in years, a cross-country road trip with a D-list Hollywood celebrity, and a diabetic Great Pyrenees to rescue: sounds like the beginning of an awful joke, but instead is the premise of Ann Garvin's entertaining and touching new novel, *I Thought You Said This Would Work*.

Samantha and Holly were once college roommates and best friends until an unknown secret leaves them barely speaking for almost 25 years. Their only commonality left is Katie, their other college roommate and best friend, who calls on both of them when she is hospitalized in Wisconsin with a relapse of her cancer.

Too sick to travel herself, Katie asks them to help her rescue her beloved Great Pyrenees, Peanut, who has been moved from a dog shelter in Los Angeles to an animal sanctuary in Utah. What follows is a hilarious, heartwarming, and unexpected cross-country road trip that involves a washed-up celebrity, unexpected romance, a few extra furry friends, and Samantha and Holly getting to the bottom of what really tore their friendship apart all those years ago.

Told from Samantha's perspective, this novel brims with heartwarming moments and the familiarity of friendships to which everyone can relate. Each chapter is spent cheering on Samantha and Holly's lost friendship, hoping they can make amends not only for the sake of their sick best friend but also for themselves.

Garvin does excellent work in balancing the heartbreaking realities of



Ann Garvin's *I Thought You Said This Would Work* is an excellent depiction of the depths and limits of true friendship.

illness and the unfair hands we are often dealt with goofy, laugh-out-loud moments that leave readers wanting more. Each character is developed in such a way that you grow to love them, flaws and all.

In a way that feels genuine and authentic, *I Thought You Said This Would Work* is an excellent depiction of how deep the bonds of friendship are and how far we are willing to go to help those that we love the most.

I Thought You Said This Would Work by Ann Garvin is set for release on May 1.

— Ally Kutz

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Our Monthly Podcast Picks

Enthralling audio infotainment we can't stop listening to

Dissect

Hosted by Cole Cuchna // Spotify Studios

If you've ever thought you understood the writing and production process of creating an album, you may only have half of the story... if that. Currently in its eighth season, host Cole Cuchna's *Dissect* dives ocean-deep into Kanye West's album *YEEZUS*, the pod's second look into one of Kanye's works. "Note by note, line by line," as Cuchna describes it, *Dissect* is like an extensive literary analysis of some of popular music's most culturally impactful albums. In his expansive studies, Cuchna (and an occasional co-host) grabs listeners by their ears and minds to expose some of the deeper-rooted symbolism, metaphors, and at times mind-blowing moments of discovery of the work, history, and research that went into projects like Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp A Butterfly*, and Frank Ocean's *Channel Orange*. For music and research nerds, this proves to be the perfect amalgamation of dedication to lyrical content, meanings behind melodies, and access to the historical backstory of albums like Beyoncé's and Lamar's. While you can never know everything, this podcast is certainly a thought-provoking, you've-got-to-be-kidding-me presentational breakdown of some of our favorite music. As its website says, "Because great art deserves more than a swipe." *Dissect* releases new episodes every Tuesday while in-season. It's available on Spotify, Apple Music and other streaming platforms. —Kimberly Firestine



How Did This Get Made?

Hosted by: Paul Scheer, Jason Mantzoukas, and June Diane Raphael // Earwolf

In a recent episode of the decade-running podcast *How Did This Get Made?*, Zack Snyder's *Justice League*, the supersized, super-serious, superhero epic, makes for perfect podcast fodder. From its bizarre (and heart-breaking) origins, to Snyder's peculiar treatment of the DC mainstays, you can peel back the layers of the 4-hour experience in both humorous and fully sincere ways. The "Justice League" episode of *How Did This Get Made?* manages to do a little bit of both, assisted by #TheTwoFriends, Griffin Newman and David Sims of the *Blank Check* podcast. In typical *HDTGM?* fashion, there's a healthy dose of fun outrage (can you say Icelandic folk song?), but it pairs well with their surprising appreciation of the completed vision. A common refrain in the episode is that Snyder's approach ONLY works in 3-4 hour long movies, which morbid curiosity has me on board with. And all four contribute some knowledge of DC Comics, but it certainly wouldn't be overwhelming to more casual fans. Other highlights: the dissection of Amber Heard's changing accent, the noting of the very literal Nick Cave needle drops, and the show's traditional "Second Opinions." I think one Griffin Newman comment rings especially true for both the film and perhaps podcast: he admits the "buy in on this thing is huge," but if you give yourself over to the craziness, you'll enjoy yourself immensely. —Christopher Lantinen



Just Between Us

Hosted by: Allison Raskin and Gaby Dunn // Forever Dog

There's something magical about how well Allison Raskin and Gaby Dunn work together. For years, they've been a comedy team, and in April 2014, they debuted their YouTube channel, called Just Between Us. Over the years, their regular talk show has amassed more than 680,000 subscribers and over 150 million views. In March of 2019, they started the podcast version of *Just Between Us*. Raskin and Dunn are best friends, and have amazing chemistry in any medium. Their personalities have a perfect interplay together, with Raskin generally being the voice of reason and Dunn being the more impetuous host. They're both extremely honest and caring, above all else. In the podcast, they examine relationships, mental health, sexuality, and what it means to process all the crazy things that life throws at you, all while being consistently hilarious and sensitive at the same time. They're generally joined by guests, most often authors – check out episodes with Janet Hardy, Ellen Forny, or *You're Wrong About's* Sarah Marshall as a good place to start. The shows flow with regular segments, like "International Questions," "Would You Stay With This Cheater?," and "Is This Person an Alien or Just Rude?" If you listen for a moment and Raskin and Dunn happen to be your thing, you'll become a lifelong convert, ready to laugh at life and maybe even understand it a little bit better than you did before. —Nick Warren



Book Review: *The Lost Apothecary*

Mystery and adventure found in Sarah Penner's debut

On a small, unassuming street aptly named Back Alley, a door sits in London in the late 18th century. Just inside is an empty storeroom with dusty shelves and a barrel of barley, seemingly undisturbed and uninhabited. But behind the wall waits Nella the apothecary and her shop of remedies and concoctions. Known for her knowledge of the trade, the once-healing apothecary has turned to more sinister dealings, providing women with well-disguised poisons to rid themselves of the men in their lives for varying reasons. When her newest customer turns out to be a 12-year-old girl named Eliza, the surprised apothecary is thrown into a series of events that jeopardizes her livelihood and threatens to expose all the women recorded in her register and the

men they had poisoned.

In present-day London, once-aspiring historian Caroline is reeling after discovering her husband has been cheating on her. After planning to go on vacation with him for their 10th anniversary, she instead embarks on a road to discovery that begins with digging through the mud near the river Thames. When she turns up an old apothecary vial, her interest in its history leads her to a string of unsolved apothecary murders from over two centuries prior, twisting together the past and present in more ways than one.

A debut novel from Sarah Penner, *The Lost Apothecary* is a stunning imagining of a sinister secret lurking below the surface of 18th century London. Written in beautiful prose with characters that come to life

on the page, the only major fault that can be found is the fact that there isn't enough of it — Penner could have easily written volumes about each character and their place in the history of the novel.

Right from the start, the book pulls the reader in, introducing each character and bringing them to life through shared experiences, many focusing on overarching themes like womanhood and motherhood, as well as the subtler but ever-present sisterhood of womankind as a whole.

Told between the perspectives of Nella and Eliza in the 18th century and Caroline in the present day, each chapter is easily devoured with a want for more: more about the women's lives, more about the mystery surrounding the apothecary, and more of the fantastic writing that defines *The Lost Apothecary*. — Ally Kutz

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Springing Creativity

The 98th Annual Spring Show at the Erie Art Museum now on display



The 2021 Nicole & Harry Martin Spring Show at the Erie Art Museum features 92 pieces by 67 artists from within a 250 mile radius of Erie.

ceramicist, social activist, spoken word poet, and educator Roberto Lugo. Lugo evaluated more than 450 submissions to arrive at his finalists, choosing five of the most exemplary works for a 2021 Juror's Distinction Award. These included:

1. Red Shoes (2019) by Cleveland Heights (Ohio) painter David King (oil/ acrylic on canvas)
2. Last Tweet (2021) by Girard painter Brad Lethaby (oil on panel)
3. Nicks BBQ (2020) by Stow (Ohio) painter Thomas Jackson (oil on canvas)
4. Princess Guerrière (2020) by Oil City painter George Cooley (acrylic on linen)
5. Ecclesiastical Backpack (2019) by Venango sculptor Chuck Johnson (hand-built ceramic from unglazed sculpture clay)

By: Matt Swanseger

Whether we're creating order out of chaos or just embracing it, the arts tend to flourish in times of turbulence. Although that push and pull is always at play in our minds

and souls, rarely has the ethical and ideological tug of war outside ourselves seemed so immediate, so omnipresent. That so many of us can find inspiration or even beauty within that maelstrom is a testament to the human spirit indeed. The 98th Annual Spring Show at the

Erie Art Museum is a regional showcase of creative magnificence amongst all the madness, featuring 92 pieces by 67 artists across a range of media and disciplines. As always, a juror from outside the region was chosen to curate the exhibit — this year's being American artist,

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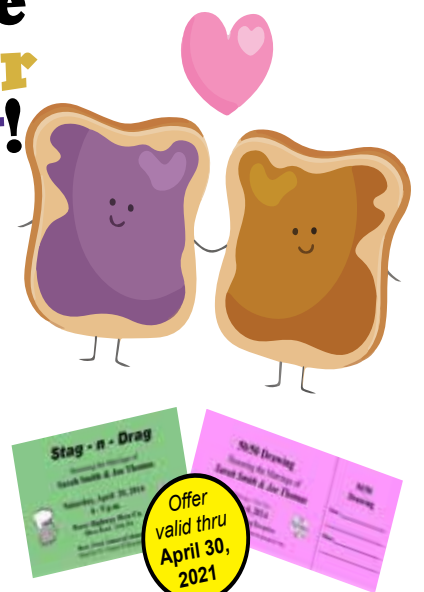
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The Northwestern Pennsylvania Artists' Association (NPAA) honored Erie artist Barbara Yerace with their annual award for In Celebration of the Bear (2020), a papier-mâché bear head intricately overlaid with colorful spirals of glass beads symbolizing the circular and cyclical nature of life and death.

The Spring Show, too, will pass in time. Before it goes, schedule a 40-minute appointment at erieartmuseum.org/visit to observe the tremendous amount of talent the region has to offer. Members can view for free; non-member adults must pay a \$10 admission fee (\$8 for senior citizens or students 16 and up). The museum is open 2 to 8 p.m. on Fridays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays, and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Sundays.

Virtual Discussion

Friday, April 9

Those interested in learning more about Lugo, the show, and the jurying process can tune in to a virtual discussion on Friday, April 9 hosted by Spring Show sponsor Edinboro University

American artist, ceramicist, social activist, spoken word poet, and educator Roberto Lugo evaluated over 450 submissions during his jurorship for this year's Spring Show.

(brucegallery.info). Lugo will be joined by Edinboro professor Stephanie L. Diez-Morel, ceramicist Linda Cordell, and Edinboro professor and moderator Leslie C. Sotomayor.

Lugo is noted for his use of porcelain — a material traditionally associated with luxury and aristocracy — to call attention to race and class struggle and celebrate minority and underrepresented figures. His work is permanently on display in the prominent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The High Museum of Art (Atlanta), The Museum of Fine Arts Boston, The Brooklyn Museum, and The Walters Museum (Baltimore).

Matt Swanseger's preferred media are crayons, fingerpaints, and pretzel crumbs. He can be reached at mswanseger@eriereader.com



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An Unusual Oscar Season for an Unusual Film Year

2021 Oscar predictions



DAVID LEE/NETFLIX, A24, SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES, FOCUS FEATURES, WARNER BROS. PICTURES

By: Forest Taylor

For being a “year without movies,” 2020 gave us a lot of great movies. Thanks to streaming services, mid-budget character-driven dramas have dominated the conversation this past year with very little CGI spectacles taking the spotlight. It was also interesting to see all the smaller independent films released earlier in the year that remained part of the discussion. This combination made the possibilities of the 2021 awards season unpredictable and exciting.

And then most of the Oscar nominations went to the same middlebrow biopics and performance-heavy melodramas that always get rewarded by the Academy. There were a few surprises but the Oscars this year were most surprising in how unsurprising they were. That’s not to say it’s all bad. For instance, for the first time the Best Director category has two women nominated (*Promising Young Woman*’s Emerald Fennell and *Nomadland*’s Chloe Zhao) as well as two Asian directors (*Minari*’s Lee Isaac Chung and Zhao again). Some of the acting slots favor younger, less established performers along with the older standard bearers.

For a categorically better picture of how interesting last year’s film world looked, check out the nominee list for the 2021 Independent Spirit Awards. But we’re here to make Oscar predictions, so let’s

dive into what the Academy might be thinking.

Best Picture

At the beginning of the season, this looked to be a two-way race between *Mank* and *The Trial of the Chicago 7*. Both films basically have “Best Picture contender” written all over them. At this point, however, it feels like both films have lost a lot of momentum to surprises like *Nomadland*, *Minari*, *Promising Young Woman*, and *Sound of Metal*. It’s still a little too early to tell, but it seems like *Nomadland* is the one to beat.

Best Director

Chloe Zhao has been winning everything in the Director categories so far and I don’t think that will show any sign of stopping when the Oscars arrive. Emerald Fennell or Lee Isaac Chung could be an upset, but I don’t think that’s likely. Zhao will become the second woman and the third Asian director to win Best Director. I’m certain of that.

Best Actor

Chadwick Boseman’s performance in *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* is heartbreaking both in the film and knowing that it will be the last performance in a career tragically cut short. It’s a certainty that the Academy will honor Boseman with

the award, but I would like to take a moment to praise the other performances nominated, especially Riz Ahmed’s devastating turn in *Sound of Metal*. This is a year where all the performances deserve some recognition but the prize will definitely go to Boseman. It’s a great performance but I wish this one could have been more competitive.

Best Actress

If I was voting, Frances McDormand would take it easily, but her performance is not nearly as showy as Academy voters prefer, plus she’s already a two-time winner. They will probably want to award a younger, less established talent and that will narrow it down to Andra Day in *The United States v. Billie Holiday* (showbiz drama = Oscar catnip) and Carey Mulligan in *Promising Young Woman* (strange, controversial horror/revenge film = wild card). This could really come down to the voters’ own personal taste more than anything, and I think it may be the hardest one to make a prediction on.

Best Supporting Actor

I’m happy they were both nominated, but giving both Daniel Kaluuya and LaKeith Stanfield Supporting Actor nominations for *Judas and the Black Messiah* is ridiculous (if they’re both supporting, who’s the lead? The FBI?) Consequently,

they could split the vote, allowing someone like Leslie Odom Jr. or Paul Raci to win instead. I’m happy Stanfield is nominated but this nomination is the worst instance of category fraud I’ve seen in quite some time. Anyway, I predict Kaluuya will win it.

Best Supporting Actress

Late last year everyone assumed this one was Glenn Close’s to lose, but then everyone actually watched *Hillbilly Elegy* (spoiler alert: it’s terrible) and now her nomination seems more like a formality. This leaves the category with no clear frontrunner and that always makes it more interesting. Both Olivia Colman and Amanda Seyfried did great work, but I’d like to see the more unexpected nominees of Youn Yuh-jung for *Minari* and especially Maria Bakalova for *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm* as the frontrunners. The Oscars are so rarely unpredictable and this race is as unpredictable as it gets!

Best Screenplay

It would have been nice to see something like *First Cow* or *I’m Thinking of Ending Things* in the Adapted Screenplay category, but it was not to be, so now I think all the momentum is behind *Nomadland* and it will win easily. Original Screenplay is a little more difficult. It seemed like Aaron Sorkin had it in the bag, but *The Trial of the Chicago 7* has been lagging and *Promising Young Woman* has picked up speed. It’s not a genre that the Academy usually rewards, plus its controversial ending has turned off a lot of audiences (including this writer). At the moment, though, it looks like it’s the one to beat.

Forest’s Oscar Predictions

Best Picture: *Nomadland*

Best Director: Chloe Zhao (*Nomadland*)

Best Actor: Chadwick Boseman (*Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*)

Best Actress: Carey Mulligan (*Promising Young Woman*)

Best Supporting Actor: Daniel Kaluuya (*Judas and the Black Messiah*)

Best Supporting Actress: Youn Yuh-jung (*Minari*)

Best Original Screenplay: Emerald Fennell (*Promising Young Woman*)

Best Adapted Screenplay: Chloe Zhao (*Nomadland*)

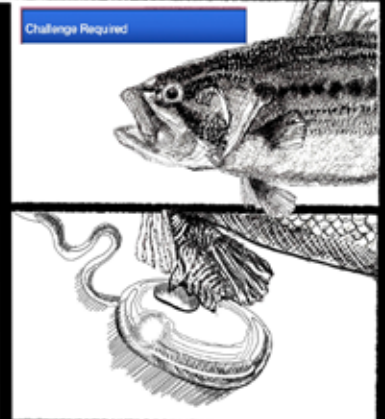
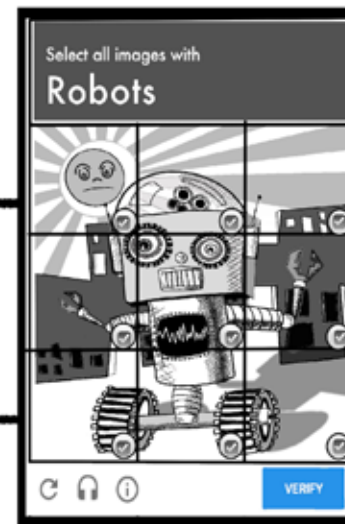
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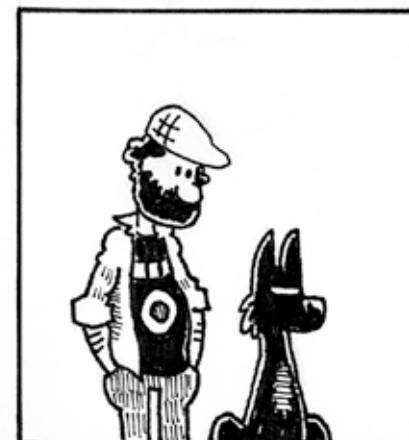


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SHE'S A SHEEP NAMED COCOA.

STANDING ON THE PRECIPICE BY BRAD PATTULLO



ALBUM REVIEWS

Maniacal Device
Hail To The King EP
Self-released
★★★★★

Erie's cross-thrash punks return with a new EP called *Hail To The King*. In true crossover fashion, these songs are short and fast. Much like D.R.I.'s *Dirty Rotten EP*, the songs on *Hail To The King* run under the two-minute mark with a total time of ten minutes. These songs were originally recorded during their sessions for *Ugly Sound - Super Rare Japanese Import* in 2018 for Presque Isle Records. This is being released through their Bandcamp to appease their fans' appetite for thrash until they can play clubs again. The set is touted as having been recorded live via satellite on Skull Island in 1986. This type of humor aligns with frontman "Morbid" Rob Burke's crass and witty lyrics, which often reference vintage horror movies, some so obscure that even the most hardcore horror fan wouldn't have seen them. Standout tracks are "La Bete" about a 1975 French exotic horror film, "Two Times Dead" about killing the undead, and the title track "Hail To The King," a reference to the eighth wonder of the World, King Kong. These songs are all killer and no filler with tight riffs and solid breakdowns. —Larry Wheaton



Citizen
Life in Your Glass World
Run For Cover Records
★★★★★

Since 2011, Citizen has been refining their grungy emo-rock into something otherworldly. What started as a sound that easily fit on stages with Run For Cover peers Title Fight and Superheaven was steered into Deftones territory on 2015's *Everybody is Going to Heaven*, and again polished to deliver Jimmy Eat World-esque hooks on 2017's *As You Please*. *Life In Your Glass World* may not be the major left-turn it's being billed as, but at moments it certainly feels convincing. Here, the trio takes inspiration from The Faint, Bloc Party, and other 2000s new wave-influenced indie rock acts. Opening track "Death Dance Approximately" starts with pummeling feedback before giving way to a blown-out disco beat. The band's rhythm section leads the charge here, offering snarling bass tones that manage to make even the catchiest songs like "I Want to Kill You" fittingly heavy. Still, it doesn't feel like coincidence when frontman Mat Kerekes sings the phrase "Save some face" on "Glass World" — the same words that open The Killers staple "Smile Like You Mean It." While the album's B-side may check more of the boxes fans have come to expect, it's thrilling to hear them continue to explore new sounds and influences a decade later. —Aaron Mook



Armand Hammer & The Alchemist
Haram
Backwoods Studioz
★★★★★

The spirit of the underground is alive in Armand Hammer. The project of NYC duo Billy Woods and Elucid has never failed to impress, but *Haram*, their fourth album in five years, may just be their greatest testament yet. Executively produced by The Alchemist (who teamed up with Freddie Gibbs on last year's hip-hop behemoth *Alfredo*), Armand Hammer uses jazzy and often psychedelic beats to deliver classic bravado, social commentary, and a specific sense of irony in equal measure. Of course, none of this is new for fans who heard the duo's breakout 2020 album, *Shrines*. But The Alchemist's work here makes *Haram* quite a bit more accessible (the minute-long "Roaches Don't Fly" serves as a perfect introduction to newcomers). The duo's unique flows will sit well with fans of not only friend and featured peer Earl Sweatshirt, but other underground artists including Navy Blue and MIKE. In fact, at times, both MCs are capable of delivering verses reminiscent of the late MF DOOM. While likely unintentional, it's a nice reminder that hip-hop isn't always defined by its more digestible headlining acts (looking at you, Run the Jewels), nor should it be. —Aaron Mook



Middle Kids
Today We're the Greatest
Domino Recording Company
★★★★★

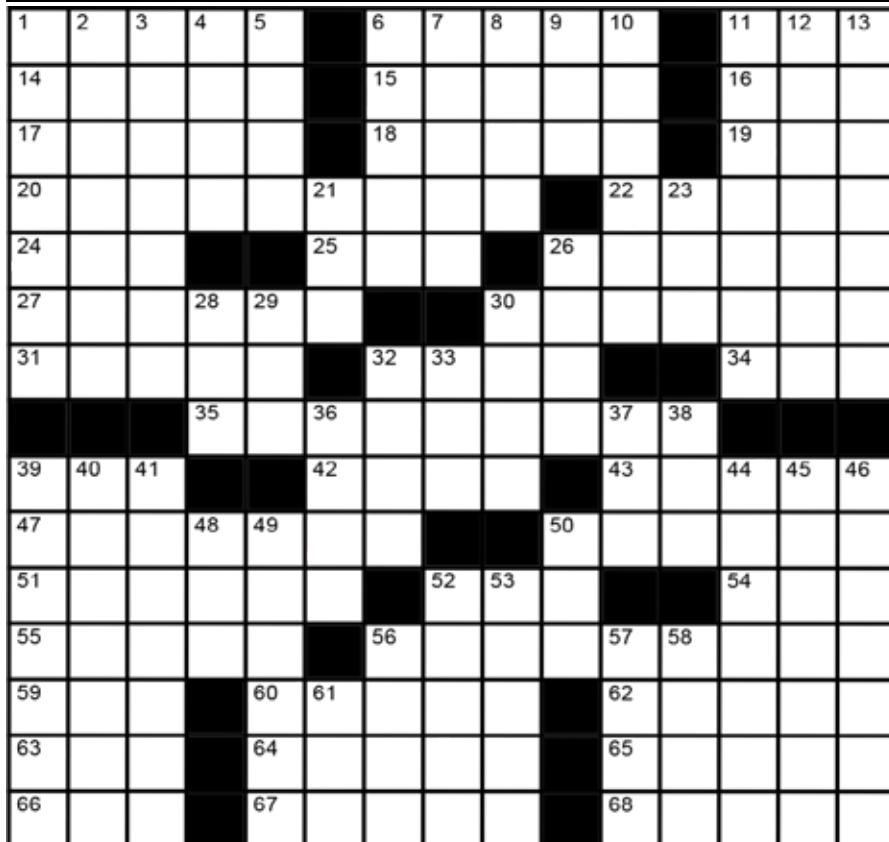
There's something to be said about an album that just makes you feel good. The sophomore full-length from the Sydney, Australia trio Middle Kids is just that kind of album. Bursting with catchy hooks and captivating choruses, *Today We're the Greatest* is an album full of anthems. It's indie-pop at its best, successfully cracking the code that's capable of filling stadiums and venues filled with fans eager to sing along to songwriter Hannah Joy's bright lyricism. After finding early success with their Gold-certified debut singles, bassist Tim Fitz and drummer Harry Day bringing Joy's visions to vibrant life, the band has made an album worth checking out. Perfect for nice days and long drives, all dozen of *Today We're the Greatest's* tracks have that optimistic sound we all want to hear as the weather gets warmer. There are lighter, uptempo tongue-in-cheek moments like "I Don't Care," and "R U 4 Me?," as well as softer cuts like "Cellophane (Brain)" and "Lost in Los Angeles." The beauty is in the simplicity of these songs. Expect to hear them get rightful airplay on college radio and be blared in the background while you shop, but trust that they're a cut above the rest. —Nick Warren



TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



CROSSWORD



Across

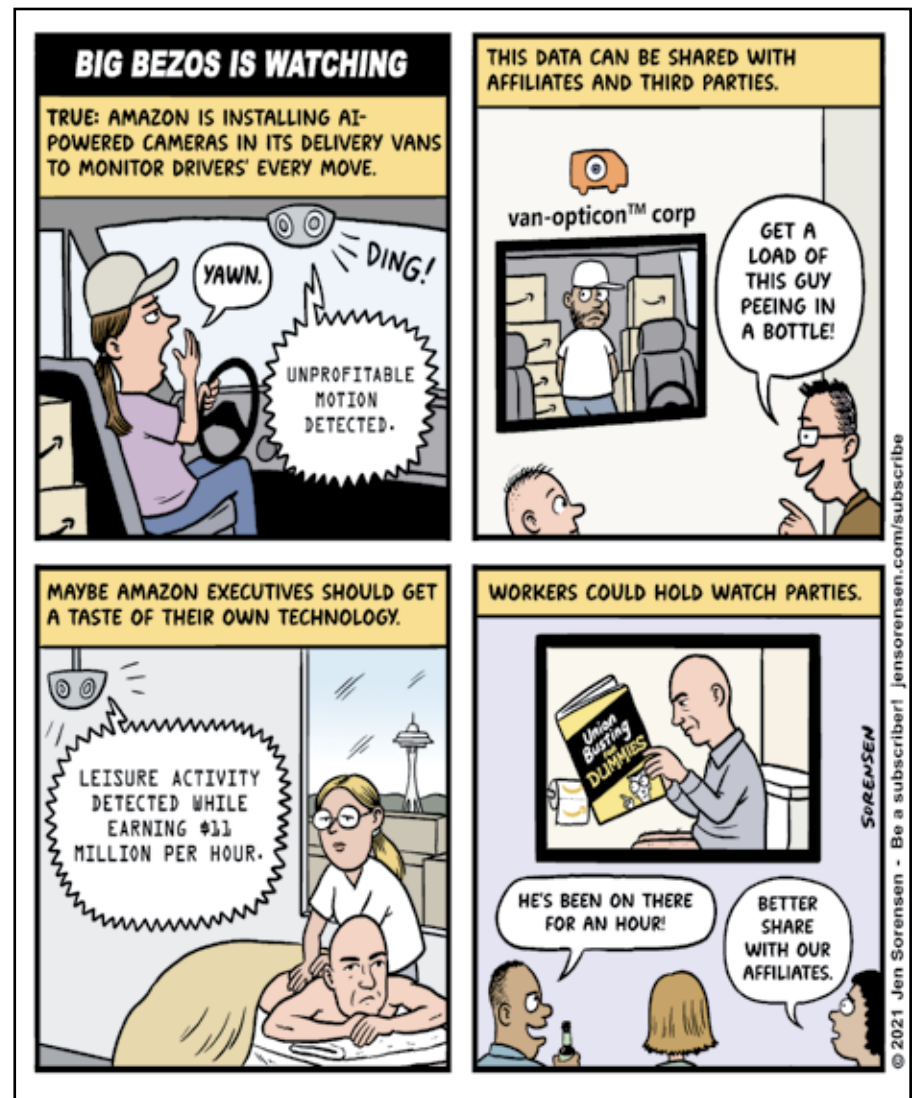
1. Stirred
6. In the know about
11. "___appétit!"
14. Like most bathrooms
15. "Are you calling me ___?"
16. Fury
17. Hoyer who became House Majority Leader in 2019
18. Gridlock consequence
19. ___ Mae (Whoopi's "Ghost" role)
20. "End of discussion"
22. Seen enough
24. Chicago's ___ Center
25. Cool, in the '80s
26. The beginning
27. Literally, "skill"
30. Exemplar of masculinity
31. Online business
32. Letter-shaped fastener
34. Windy City trains
35. "Them's the rules"
39. "My mama done ___ me"
42. Vex
43. "Hanging" problems in the 2000 election
47. Reference work on notable people published since 1899
50. Quite a sight
51. The "O" of AOC
52. British pop star Rita

54. Miracle-___
55. Causes of ruin
56. The skinny
59. Org. that collects 1099s
60. Face With Tears of Joy, for one
62. POTUS #18
63. Tater ___
64. Hedge fund titan nicknamed "The Palindrome"
65. Woman with une nièce
66. ___-pitch softball
67. Warrin' Harding?
68. Invaded someone's privacy

Down

1. In jeopardy
2. Lacking
3. 1992 David Mamet play
4. English county closest to Continental Europe
5. Ice cream brand known as Dreyer's west of the Rockies
6. ___ yoga
7. Troy story
8. Painter Mondrian
9. Greek letter shaped like a cross
10. Harry Potter, e.g.
11. 1996 Pauly Shore comedy
12. First, second, or third, e.g.
13. Makes tidy
21. "Impractical Jokers"

- network ___TV
23. Exclamations of regret
26. Crunchable numbers
28. Image file type with a much-debated pronunciation
29. Cape Canaveral's locale: Abbr.
30. Botch
32. The Jonas Brothers, e.g.
33. Abbr. on a returned check
36. Texter's "As I see it ..."
37. Like the planet Hoth in "The Empire Strikes Back"
38. Baseball scoreboard letters
39. Cost of a shave and a haircut, once
40. Top 10 hit for Neil Sedaka
41. Helps finance, say
44. Kabul native
45. Early TV star with a biography titled "Schnozzola"
46. On the schedule
48. Opposite NNW
49. Most like Gandalf
50. Take in the groceries?
52. Sarcastic "Great!"
53. Ronald : Nancy :: Mikhail : ___
56. Threadbare
57. NYPD figures
58. Do a pre-Christmas task
61. Pasture sound



Answers to last puzzle



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A FILM BY KEN BURNS AND LYNN NOVICK

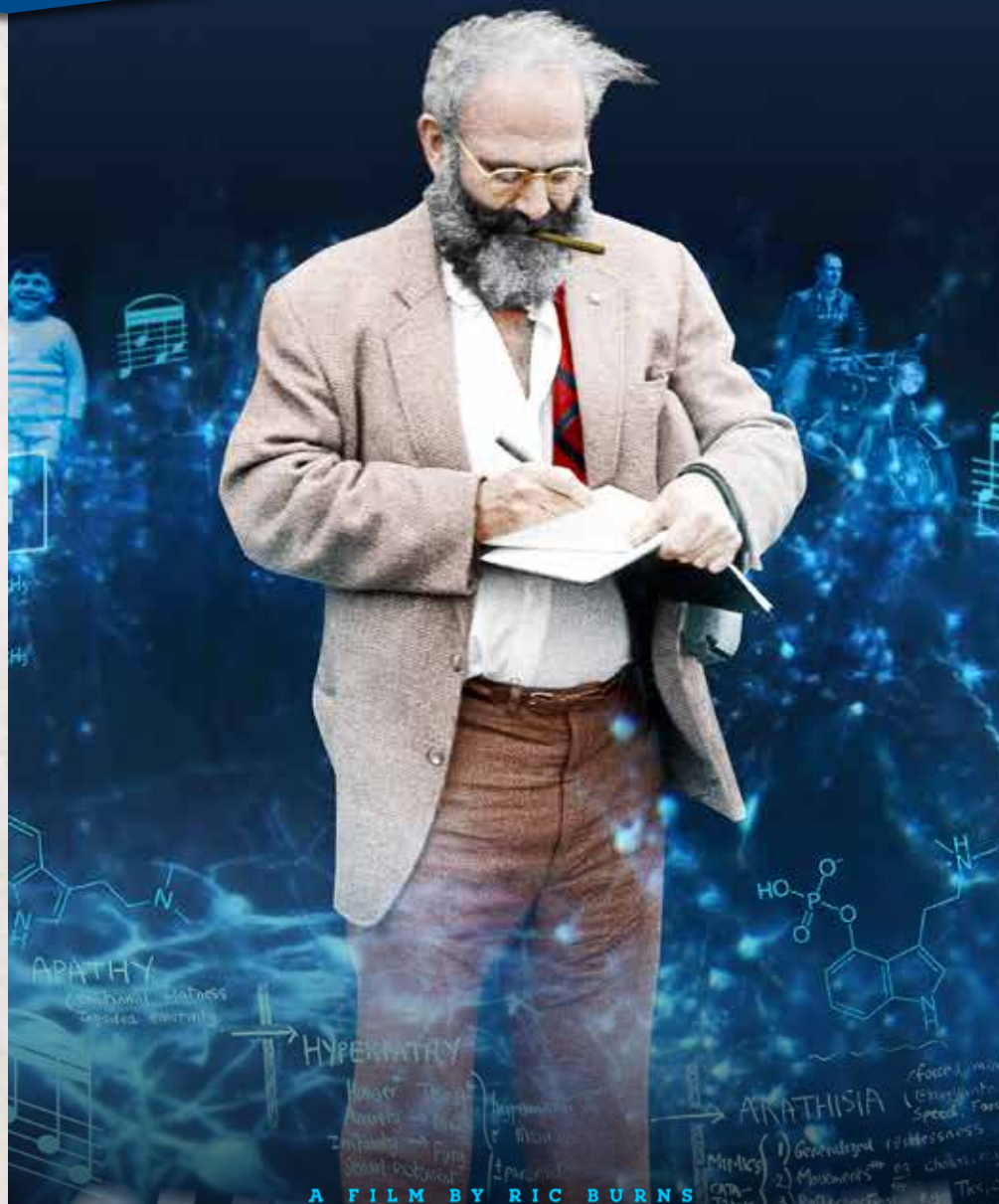
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