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ERIE READER

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HISTORICAL MUSEUMS AND SOCIETIES
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Editors-in-Chief

Brian Graham & Adam Welsh

Managing Editor

Erin Phillips

Copy Editor

Matt Swanseger

Contributing Editors

Ben Speggen

Nick Warren

Media Editor / Photographer

Jessica Hunter

Contributors

Liz Allen

John Bavaro

Jonathan Burdick

Edwina Capozziello

Anthony Carson

Nathaniel Clark

Susannah Faulkner

Chloe Forbes

Ally Kutz

Tommy Link

Aaron Mook

Brad Pattullo

Alana Sabol

Jen Sorensen

Melissa Sullivan Shimek

Cara Suppa

Forest Taylor

Thomas Taylor

Bryan Toy

Amy VanScoter

Larry Wheaton

Cover Photo

Jessica Hunter

Cover Layout

Nick Warren

1001 State St. Suite 1315
Erie, Pa., 16501
contact@eriereader.com

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From The Editors

New Years Rulin's

On Jan. 1, 1943, American folk legend Woody Guthrie wrote up a list of his (now infamous) "New Years Rulin's" (sic) in which he listed all of the ways (33 to be exact) he could hope to improve his life in the new year. And while this list was written 80 years ago, his thoughts are still incredibly relevant — simple, timeless, and universally human.

The very first entry on his list is: WORK MORE AND BETTER. What better goal is there than to do what we love as much as we can and do it the very best we can?

Here at the Reader, we're always reminded of doing our best work in January because of our (now 10th annual) Best of Erie awards. The yearly title of being the "best" comes 100 percent from the citizens of Erie who took the time to nominate and then vote for those businesses, people, places, and products that they feel represent the best of what Erie has to offer. We've reported the results of this year's contest within this issue, and while there are always some surprises and upsets, there are those few who have won their category every single year since we began recognizing the Best of Erie 10 years ago — and it is for those places we give our highest kudos. Thank you for consistently working more and better.

Woody also aims to READ LOTS OF GOOD BOOKS. We agree wholeheartedly with this goal, and as such, we've featured the co-owners of Werner Books and Coffee (Kyle and Lauren) on our cover, within Best of Erie (where they've taken home the win in both Best New Business and Best Bookstore categories this year), and in an interview with Jessica Hunter this month.

Other rulin's include KEEP HOPING MACHINE RUNNING and LOVE EVERYBODY, which are values that our writer Liz Allen highlights this month in her story about an art contest inspired by the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

BANK ALL EXTRA MONEY and SAVE DOUGH are two rulin's Jonathan Burdick can get behind, as he features a number of local, independent historical societies, all of whom are working with very few resources to keep the stories of Erie County's smaller municipalities alive.

The last rulin' on Woody's list is WAKE UP AND FIGHT. Our latest op-ed writer Susannah Faulkner is fully on board with this. She plans to continue to use her voice to encourage everyone to pay closer attention and work for change, as she dives into our latest local political debacle.

This year, whether you have 33 rulin's or just one, we hope that you can take inspiration from all the best that Erie has to offer and use that inspiration to work more and better in 2024.

World-changers: MLK Inspires Erie Teens to Serve Others

Youth Leadership Institute of Erie encourages young people to follow King's example

By: Liz Allen

To change the world, follow the example of the late Dr. Martin Luther King.

That's the message that the Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) of Erie imparts to young people by encouraging them to express themselves, perform random acts of kindness, and participate in community service to make positive change.

Winners of the YLI's annual "Day of Expression Project," which is tied into the Martin Luther King holiday, are being announced in this issue of the Erie Reader. Teens have additional opportunities to be change-makers on Monday, Jan. 15, the King holiday, and during the months leading up to Global Youth Service Day activities in late April.

For the "Day of Expression" contest, high school students were invited to explore the question "How can I change the world?" by submitting an original painting, drawing, photo, video, spoken- or written-word entry.

We are pleased to announce the names of the three winners, all seniors at Collegiate Academy. All three chose art to express themselves. **Tahjgere Morgan** won the grand prize of \$250 for "Wrestle for Equality." Runners-up are **Nicholas Groemminger**, for "Flipping the Coin to a Bright Future," and **Anthony D'Albora**, for "Drive for Success." Each will be awarded \$150. Erie Art Museum volunteers judged the entries.

Groemminger said that he used oil pastels for the bright colors in his artwork and chalk pastels for the darker side. His love of animation also influenced his work. "I tend to try to make art that has movement in it," he said. "When people see this piece, I want them to think about how perspective can affect how we see different people and how they are treated," Groemminger said. "When someone is being treated unfairly, sometimes it is hard to understand what they are feeling. If someone takes a moment to see things from their perspective, we can achieve an understanding and more fair treatment much more easily."

Perspective can also be broadened by accepting new challenges for yourself, by giving back to others and by expanding your knowledge of history,

according to those involved with the YLI. Cori Edwards became executive program manager for YLI on Aug. 21, after working in early childhood education for more than 20 years and, most recently, serving as director of the East-side YMCA.

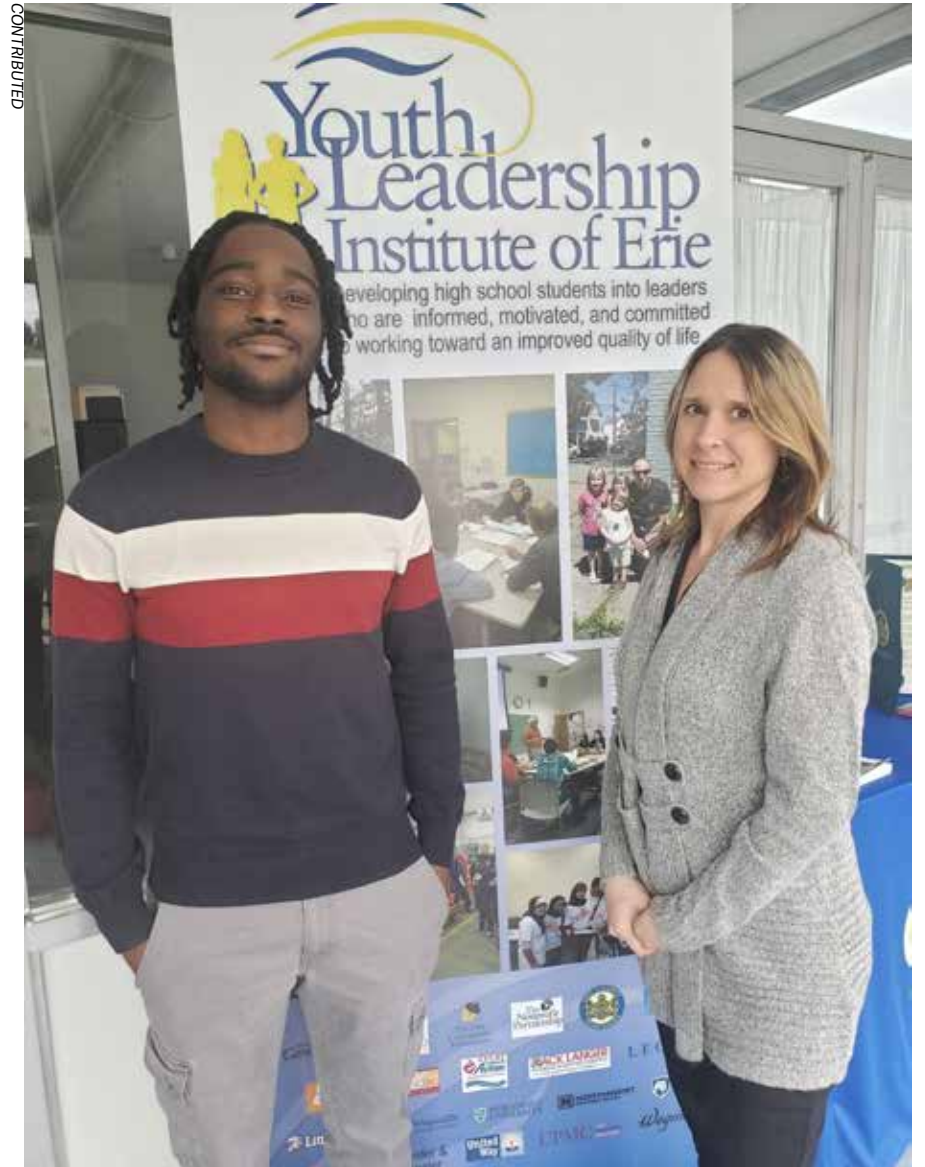
"The Youth Leadership Institute offered the opportunity to reach outside and inspire youth to achieve their goals and to collaborate with the community, young and old," she said. Edwards had a "rough childhood," including getting pregnant at age 15. "I was on the track where it could go either way," she said. "Once I found my thing, I was okay." Her "thing" included earning a master's degree in education from Gannon University, but she knows that young people and their parents face challenges while searching for the right career path and figuring out how to make that career a reality through additional education.

"Youth Leadership Institute takes the resources that are out there and offers them to students in a way that is accessible," she said. One way that YLI does that is through its Life Experience Activities Program (LEAP), which allows students from eighth grade on up to "test out careers" by spending three days at a participating business or university. LEAP programs this semester allow teens to learn about careers in cosmetology, finance, medicine, and intelligence studies, to name a few.

Michael Coleman III, 20, is the youth engagement coordinator for YLI. A graduate of Mercyhurst Prep, Coleman is majoring in business at the Erie County Community College and will graduate this spring. After working in retail and fast food jobs, he decided to go to the community college "because I wanted something that could start my business career," he said.

Both staff members are working hard to spread the word that YLI has received a lead agency grant from the Youth Service America organization to increase youthful participation in the MLK Day of Service and during Global Youth Service Days in April. "The goal is to give Erie County a voice for youth, coming together for one common goal, to say 'Erie County cares,'" said Edwards.

YLI wants to enlist at least 750 young people to pledge to do a "random act of



Michael Coleman III, youth engagement coordinator, and Cori Edwards, executive program manager, both of Youth Leadership Institute of Erie, encourage Erie teens to get involved in the upcoming Martin Luther King Day of Service activities.

kindness" on the King holiday. Participating students have a chance to win one of four \$50 gift cards. Submitting a photo as part of the documentation will give them an additional chance to win a gift card. "We're taking the philanthropy of Martin Luther King. He served. Service was at the root of who Martin Luther King was," Edwards said. "We want to make sure our county is reflected as a county that helps."

Edwards, Coleman, and Edison Nicholson, founder and CEO of YLI, were all born after Dr. King was assassinated on April 4, 1968. But all three have found ways to learn about the late civil rights leader's life and to honor his ongoing influence in Erie and the world.

Edwards remembers being taught

"very specific things" about MLK and questions why students weren't given a broader picture when she was in school. "Eventually I realized that community service was a huge part (of his life)," she said.

"We can do a better job of educating our youth," Coleman agreed that when it comes to King's story and the civil rights movement, "There was a lot more happening than what we learned in school." His 90-year-old great-grandmother participated in marches and visited the MLK home in Atlanta, which is now a museum. She helped him to gain a fuller portrait of King, he said.

"King was a drum major for many upcoming young, vibrant people who

CONTRIBUTED



The Youth Leadership Institute announced the winners from their recent high school art contest, the "Day of Expression Project," which asked artists to explore the question: how can I change the world? (From left) Winner Tahjgere Morgan with "Wrestle for Equality" and runners-up Nicholas Groemminger for "Flipping the Coin to a Bright Future" and Anthony D'Albora for "Drive For Success."

want to serve," said Nicholson, who was born 11 months after King was killed. His list of local leaders who emulated King includes the Rev. E.F. Smith, Erma Lindsey, Mildred and Howard Horton, Bobby Harrison, Ernest Denny, Alex Thompson and the 10 Black officers who were added to the Erie Bureau of Police in 1974 by court order. "They all

came out of this movement. They catapulted Erie into a new era of thinking." Nicholson also includes his grandfather, the Rev. Samuel Ward, a minister in the AME Zion church, as a strong influence on him and on the Erie community as well. Dr. King was also a person of faith, he said. "It is indeed individuals of faith that are going to change the

world," Nicholson said.

He then shared one of his favorite MLK quotes: "Everybody can be great... because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

To register for the random act of kindness, visit tinyurl.com/YLIMLK

For more information, contact mcoleman@ylerie.org or call 814-520-5565.

Liz Allen can be reached at lizerie@aol.com



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Educational Tax Credits: A Discredit to Public Schools?

State budget item furthers discrimination in education using taxpayer dollars

By: Chloe Forbes

The Commonwealth Court recently ruled Pennsylvania's funding for education is unconstitutional, prompting Governor Josh Shapiro to invest more than ever in education.

Pennsylvania's budget — signed on Dec. 13 — includes a \$567 million increase in basic education funding. Shapiro highlighted a \$150 million increase in funding for the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) programs. Last year, the programs received \$405 million.

To overcome a budget impasse, Shapiro made decisions to appease both sides of the aisle in a split legislature. However, that decision may further discrimination as taxpayer dollars are slated for private schools rather than equitable public education.

The EITC funding, managed by Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development, provides tax credits to businesses when they support education through local nonprofits. Examples of area EITC recipients are Early Connections, Asbury Woods, Erie Art Museum, Erie Philharmonic, Erie Zoo, and the expERIENCE Children's Museum.

Erie Insurance is one of the donors that finds it beneficial to support local nonprofits through the EITC program. "While public-private partnerships such as Pennsylvania's EITC program benefit our company's bottom line, the EITC program allows us to expand the reach of our philanthropic support and increase the impact of each dollar donated," Ann Scott, Erie Insurance's community outreach manager, said in a media statement in April.

On the other hand, the private-public partnership is not always favorable, and this type of funding has been criticized.

Opponents of the governor's school funding plan feel some allocations wrongfully take money intended for public schools and funnel it to private — sometimes religious — schools under the guise of "opportunity" and "educational improvement."

OSTC funding, another tax credit program, goes partially toward scholarship vouchers. The commonwealth defines scholarship vouchers as any form of public payment to help parents send their children to nonpublic schools when the family lives in a district determined to be in the bottom 15 percent of public schools in Pennsylvania. The performance of schools is measured using standardized tests that are *only* taken at public schools, so there's no even playing field to determine if nonpublic schools would rank higher or lower.

As a result, voucher programs allow parents to choose a nonpublic school using taxpayer dollars. The benefit to certain families might come at a cost for residents of the commonwealth.

A December 2023 report from Education Voters of Pennsylvania investigated 159 OSTC voucher-funded schools and found 100 percent have policies that

CHLOE FORBES



CHLOE FORBES



[Top] Mercyhurst Preparatory High School is a recipient of state-funded school vouchers for attendance; however their stated admissions requirements do not exclude students based on personal beliefs, sexual orientation, or gender identity. [Bottom] Bethel Christian Elementary School is one of 16 private schools in Erie that receives taxpayer funded school vouchers from the state. This school states openly on their website that students may be rejected from admission if their "personal or family lifestyle is not in harmony with the stated statement of faith and purpose of Bethel Christian School."

may be discriminatory. Private schools do not have to follow the guidelines that govern public schools and ensure transparency for taxpayers about where their money goes. With a lack of transparency in policy and funding, types of discrimination may impact students based on disability, religion, academics, LGBTQIA+ status, and so forth.

In Erie County, 16 schools receive OSTC scholarship funds: Bethel Christian School of Erie, Erie First Christian Academy, Leadership Christian Academy, Luther Memorial Academy, Mercyhurst Prep, Mother Teresa, Cathedral Prep, the Erie Catholic School System (Saint James, Saint Jude, Blessed Sacrament, Erie Catholic, Our Lady of Peace, Saint George, and Saint Luke schools), and nonreligious schools Erie Day

School and Montessori in the Woods.

It is not surprising that religious schools, like those under the Erie Catholic School System, follow a mission that aligns with their interpretation of Bible teachings. These positions may lead to inequitable policies at taxpayer cost.

For example, Bethel Christian School states on its website, "Marriage is the joining of one man and one woman. God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. Furthermore, God wonderfully and immutably created each person as male and female. Rejection of one's biological sex through homosexuality, lesbianism, or bisexuality is a rejection of the image of God within that person."



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The statement disadvantages students who identify with the LGBTQIA+ community.

Bethel Christian also states that a pastor should recommend the family for admission, and the school expects families to attend church regularly. Statements like this erect barriers that disadvantage students based on criteria unrelated to Pennsylvania's constitutional guarantee of providing a "thorough and efficient" education for every child.

"Bethel Christian School reserves the right to deny admission or continued attendance to any individual who cannot benefit from enrollment based on academic achievement, disqualifying handicap, or whose personal or family lifestyle is not in harmony with the stated statement of faith and purpose of Bethel Christian School," its website reads. This statement furthers evidence of policies and practices that provide taxpayer-funded support for a select group of students.

Nonpublic schools that do not receive federal funding must adhere to the guidelines outlined by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). Title III of the ADA prohibits discrimination by public accommodations and states that private institutions that serve the public must make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, and procedures that deny access to individuals with disabilities.

However, Title III does not cover religious institutions, so private schools directly operated by religious institutions are not covered by the ADA's requirement.

In other schools, like Mercyhurst Prep and Cathedral Prep, students must take an academic assessment for admission.

The Reader reached out to all 16 nonpublic schools before the passage of Pennsylvania's budget to ask about policies and practices used when deciding who gets admitted with tuition vouchers, along with questions about their mission. Mercyhurst Prep was the only school to respond and was the most forthcoming on its website about admissions and policies.

While other schools did not respond to our inquiries, they will soon have to provide greater transpar-

ency for the public as new state guidelines will require nonpublic schools to report certain data.

President Joe Haas said Mercyhurst Prep is a college preparatory school, so the only admissions requirement is academic achievement. "The only admission concern we would look at, regardless of how the family intends on paying the tuition, is whether or not the student is adequately prepared for our rigorous academic environment," Haas said. "While we are a Catholic school, we do not expect nor require our students to be Catholic. We have students from multiple religious backgrounds. Additionally, our school facilities are fully accessible to students, or anyone, with disabilities, and no student is rejected or dismissed due to sexual or gender identity."

He said financial aid decisions, including EITC and OSTC funds, are made after a student's admittance to Mercyhurst Prep.

"If anything, EITC and OSTC funding provides bright, motivated students with the financial resources to attend our school when their family might not otherwise be able to provide them with this opportunity," Haas concluded.

Many nonpublic schools have scholarships for low-income families. However, students who are economically disadvantaged may be struggling in academics or have behavioral issues due to the lack of behavioral health services and the digital divide, reported as worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While it is commendable to give parents a choice to send their children to a higher performing school that may or may not align with their moral values, critics argue that nonpublic schools don't guarantee success, and taxpayer dollars should go toward funding public schools. Instead, low-income students may slip through the cracks, and scholarship money goes toward select middle-class families for an "improved" education.

Shapiro's choice benefits nonpublic schools and families who want a choice in education, but it may have neutralized the impact of the Commonwealth Court's ruling.

In a public statement on its website, the National

Education Association (NEA) states, "If we're serious about doing what's right for every child's future, let's do what works: Support public schools so that every student has inviting classrooms, modern technology and textbooks, and class sizes that are small enough for one-on-one attention."

By requiring taxpayers to fund two school systems — one private and one public — public schools once again lose funding even though they continue to educate 90 percent of students in Pennsylvania. Lack of funding contributes to larger class sizes and fewer resources, loss of extracurricular programming, and a teacher shortage.

Currently, data linking nonpublic scholarship vouchers and gains in student achievement do not exist. Vouchers, created when the U.S. Supreme Court banned school segregation during the Civil Rights era, allow private schools to admit students based on race in a way public schools could not.

Opponents of vouchers argue that by its very nature, the voucher program is discriminatory. The court ruling this summer stated that the current educational system violates the Constitution's guarantee of a "thorough and efficient" education for every child.

In a letter to Shapiro from PA Schools That Work, the activist group argued legislators should "devote all available state resources to meeting your constitutional obligation to the hundreds of thousands of public school students who are desperately trying to learn in under-resourced schools."

While nobody seems to argue that funding education is wrong or wasteful, there is a discrepancy about what the "best" model looks like and how partnerships could fill the gap. After all the political statements are said and done, there remains an underlying lack of funding for true public education, undermining the Commonwealth Court decision and furthering inequity among students in our region.

Chloe Forbes is a local journalist. Reach her at chloeforbes14@gmail.com.



Erie County Human Relations Commission

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The Battle of 2023: Erie City Council's Turbulent Year Toward Progress

The political establishment remains difficult to budge

By: Susannah Faulkner

Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2024 will be a day for the history books in our city. City Hall and our local officials were in the spotlight yet again over their penchant for cronyism and corruption, and faced scrutiny from the public at the first Erie City Council meeting of the year. Less than three hours from the end of that marathon meeting, two 15-year-old girls were engaged in a fight on a bus outside Erie High, resulting in a brutal, non-fatal stabbing. If you find these two events unrelated, it's time to start paying closer attention.

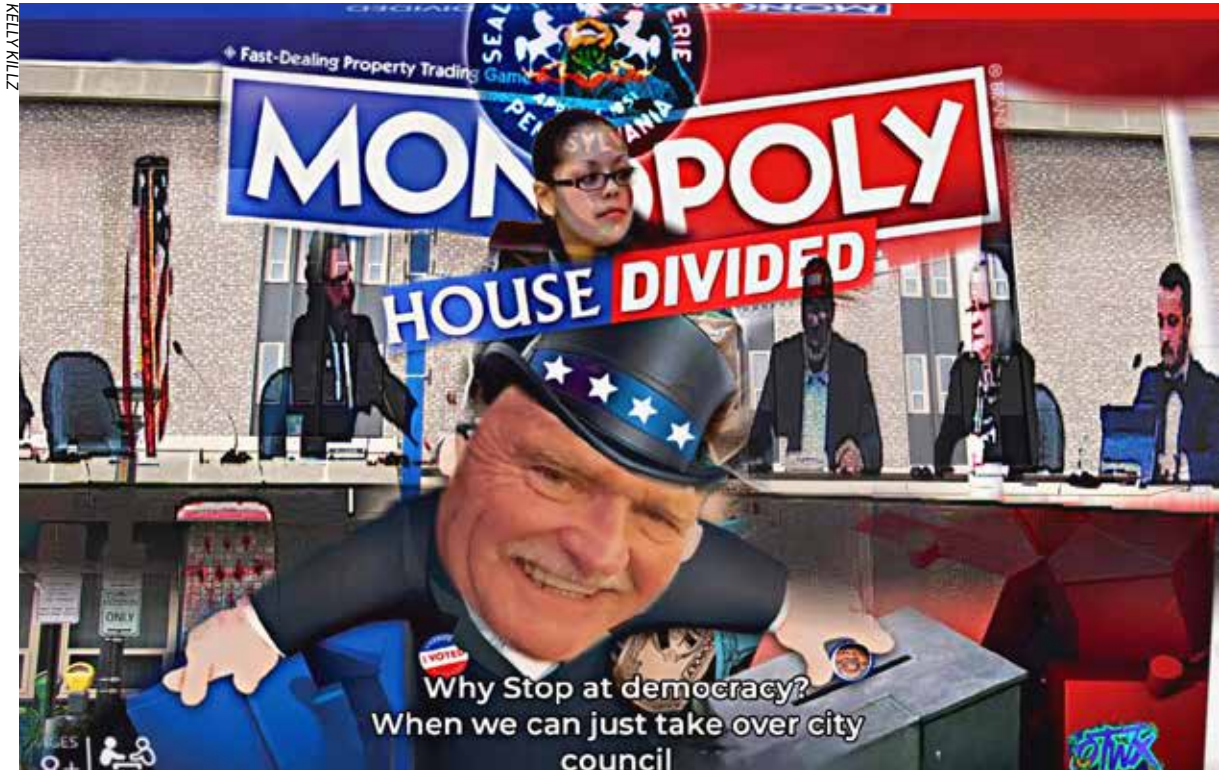
We must rewind to exactly one year ago at the previous Erie City Council reorganization meeting of 2023. At that meeting, we saw Chuck Nelson win the presidency over Mel Witherspoon, along with the abrupt resignation of Liz Allen, leaving an empty seat. As a bystander, I was relieved to see the changes.

City Hall followed a democratic process to fill the seat from the applicants of 20 interested residents. When I secured the spot in February 2023, outranking former Councilor Kathy Schaaf by just three points, it felt surreal. As a political no-name, it was refreshing that the council valued merit over name recognition. Our new council immediately got to work and managed to pass more legislation to serve the people of Erie in one year than the past three combined.

In retaliation to that progress, the Old Boys Club plotted a legal coup to regain power. Councilor Ed Brzezinski ran for both the 4-year seat and the 2-year seat created by Allen's resignation with a long term goal of stripping the voters of choice over the pending future vacancy if he won both. Running for multiple seats like this is completely admissible under the state's feeble election laws. Texas, Tennessee, and Mississippi are among a few of the many states that actually outlaw this practice. Brzezinski won both seats, edging out my strong first finish by only 299 votes for the 2-year seat. This is yet another reminder of how much full participation in every single election matters.

Rumors began swirling over the summer of Brzezinski's ultimate goal of appointing his buddy Witherspoon back on council despite reaching the end of his term limit. Lucky for them, City Solicitor Ed Betza willfully made a reaching interpretation of these rules, suggesting that just a one-day break in service constituted enough time to no longer "succeed" oneself.

At the end of my appointment, I issued a grave warning to the public on these efforts within City Hall to circumvent the democratic process of filling the open seat. Although the Office of the City Clerk did their due diligence and alerted the public of the application process for the vacancy, Brzezinski's cronies were ready to seal the deal with legal interpretation on their side. Before the 13 applicants



The plot initiated by city councilman Ed Brzezinski to appoint Mel Witherspoon after he reached his term limit has a number of constituents and council members calling for a more transparent process. The 13 public applicants for council appointment were rejected in a final vote by the mayor to reappoint Witherspoon.

were notified of any interview process, a resolution made its way onto the City Council agenda for the first meeting of the year to directly appoint Witherspoon, stating that he "is able to be appointed after his term ended and contribute with his many years of experience on City Council." Word spread quickly at the start of the new year on this Brzezinski-led effort, which received its vital second motion of support from Councilor Maurice "Mo" Troop, who also serves as an assistant principal at Erie High.

There was initial hope after the council meeting, especially given the split in public opinion (15 against the resolution to appoint Witherspoon and three in favor) and the mayor's assurance that he would leave the process up to the six members of council. Schember further asserted that public interviews ought to be scheduled "in the interest of transparency" (Erie Times News, 2024). As an applicant, I anxiously awaited notification on the council's next move. City Clerk Laurie Watson contacted all applicants the next day with a brief assignment on their vision for the job as well as scheduling for a special council session for interviews on Tuesday, Jan. 9 at 5:30 p.m.

In less than 24 hours, Schember did an about-face and signed the resolution appointing Witherspoon to yet again sit at the dais. Not only did Schember continue the violation of the spirit of the law on term limits, but he usurped newly chosen President Jasmine Flores' power to set the remaining process

for filling the vacancy. It is no surprise, given that Flores' rise to presidency was one of the only bright spots that day. Her herculean growth from her first campaign in 2019 is admirable, and she makes history as both the youngest and the first Latina leader of Erie City Council. The City's Office of Communications has released no photographs or statements on this accomplishment, and this silence is notably loud.

I see the clear divide between the Old Boys Club, where Schaaf has firmly cemented herself to do their work, and the New Lucid Lions, wherein political lions are considered leaders who can usher in transformative change. The Old Boys Club asked for respect during that Jan. 3 council meeting. What they really want is our collective compliance and silence.

I turn and ask Mayor Schember and councilors Witherspoon, Brzezinski, Schaaf, and Troop: how will you demonstrate your respect for our youth and their future this year? A child was stabbed leaving school on the same day that you prioritized internal politicking over public service. Neglecting the urgency for real change will not only cost elections but will cost lives. Our youth are still screaming out. Don't fail them.

Susannah Faulkner is a former Erie City Council appointee. She can be reached at susannah.faulkner@gmail.com

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The Town's Attic: The Importance of Our Small Town Historical Museums and Societies

Why the little things of our past can resonate so largely

By: Jonathan Burdick

My wife was recently watching a video shared on social media of a vibrant and bustling shopping mall in Somewhere, USA. It was the late-1980s or maybe the early-1990s, evident from the synthesized harmonies and the comforting familiarity of the camcorder's graininess, poor lighting, and awful sound quality. It was a vibe that tugged on the nostalgic heartstrings: the aesthetic, the arcade, the clothing, once popular stores long out of business, all rekindling an ache for this pre-internet era — not simpler times, necessarily, but certainly *different* times.

"Should we record us just walking through the Millcreek Mall?" she asked. "So the boys have it when they are older?"

I understood her point. The Millcreek Mall, which first opened in 1975, is very different today than it was when we were kids. Who knows what it will look like two or three decades from now? For the previous generation, the same can be said of their memories of State Street's Boston Store, which closed in 1979 largely due to competition with the flashy suburban mall.

What at one time seems mundane often becomes more meaningful with the passage of time. While sometimes yesterday's junk (or grainy video footage) remains just that, sometimes it becomes something more. The old cardboard Troyer Farm Potato Chip bin in my parents' basement comes to mind or my grandfather's vintage Avon colognes that I have stored away. Somehow these items dodged the garbage bins over the years and now they each tell part of a story, however small.

Many of these stories *do* get lost in the landfills though, lost to time, disappearing from our collective memories each time somebody dies and their untold stories go with them. Each time someone's 50-year-old love letters are thrown in the trash, or an old building is razed to make room for a parking lot, or old VHS tapes of family gatherings wear out, the stories within are lost forever.

These seemingly inconsequential stories — interpreted through photographs, video, documents, and artifacts that may have at one time appeared mundane — are where our small historical societies and museums thrive.

"State and national history [that is] studied [often] focuses on big, general topics," says Dale H. Docter, president of the nearby Cambridge Springs Museum and History Center. "A small town museum exposes residents to where they came from on a local level."

Docter adds that small town museums interpret the stories of the accomplishments and failures of those who established their town, the tales of its business and industries present and past, and provide us with a glimpse as to how people entertained themselves in bygone eras.



Small historical societies like the Corry Area Historical Society (top and bottom left) and the Cambridge Springs Museum and History Center (right) keep local history alive by archiving materials and creating educational displays.

The Museums Association, the oldest museum association in the world, believes that exposure to such information can even change lives. "Museums can increase our sense of well-being, help us feel proud of where we have come from, can inspire, challenge and stimulate us, and make us feel healthier," the organization contends.

Dick Tefft is well-known for his research and writing on North East, Pennsylvania. He's also the treasurer for the North East Historical Society. He believes that their role since their founding in 1989 has been to preserve the history of the North East community so that residents will always have the knowledge of what came before them.

"It is a history that is more personal than the kind of history that you learn in school," Tefft explains. "It might be a history that maybe is not as important as the bigger histories that are taught, but nonetheless, it is important to many who live here. People can come to learn about something they may have heard about or maybe they even remember something about. They can find information about the lives of their families that lived here before them."

The preservation of documents and artifacts is also an essential role of these organizations. Ann Clark, president of the Corry Area Historical Society, notes that they house over 20,000 artifacts including a

coal-fired Climax locomotive engine that was built in Corry by the Climax Manufacturing Company, along with their extensive archives.

What captures people's interest and imagination often varies. It might be the fashion of the time period or reading through someone's daily journal. Other times it is looking through old newspapers and seeing the day-to-day happenings and advertisements. Sometimes it is simply looking at past photographs of buildings and comparing them to today.

"There are a couple of things that are always a hit for local people who visit," Tefft says of the North East Historical Museum. "One are the signs of businesses, no longer in existence, that we have hanging on our walls. They will walk around and see an old favorite and talk about the 'good old days' when they shopped there."

The other is high school yearbooks. "People love to look up their parents or grandparents to see what their school days looked like and what they participated in," says Tefft.

When asked what he wished people knew about the Cambridge Springs museum, Docter is straightforward: "We want people to know we exist. We, as the town's attic, are one of the town's best kept secrets."

He remarks that many locals *do* know them from their two major history nights presented each year,

CONTRIBUTED



Preserving local military history (left) is one of the services that local, mostly volunteer-run historical societies do. Facilities in Corry, North East (top and bottom right), and Cambridge Springs, along with other small municipalities in Erie County, do important work with very few resources.

but many more *don't*, even with their community outreach and widespread promotion.

"People need to know we have The Enterprise News microfilms from about 1900 until the paper quit publishing; that we have an extensive collection family genealogies and obituaries, binders of history on the hotels, cottages, the golf course, the schools and sports, Alliance College, the businesses on the various streets, and more," continues Docter. "The two floors of our museum allow visitors to get a glimpse of our past and the items we used in our daily lives. We want people to understand that knowing where we are from helps one know who we are today and where we are going."

Clark notes that while Corry's museum has regular hours (which can be found on their website), they also open for requests and appointments too. This is the case with many of the small local museums whose maintainers — most of whom are volunteers — are eager and excited to share local history.

So, what's the plan for 2024?

Clark says that the Corry Area Historical Society will spend this year working on stories and signage for their displays and increasing community involvement. They will also continue to maintain, preserve, and improve the museum building, grounds, and materials as well as the continuous tasks of adding information to databases, scanning the archives for digital access, and, of course, researching local history, genealogy, and whatever other requests come their way.

As for North East, Tefft says they have a few popular projects being worked on. "One is applying large photos with a little explanation of long lost buildings

on current buildings around town," he says. "Another is applying bronze plaques on storefronts that trace the history of all the businesses that ever existed in that business location."

In Cambridge Springs, they have two new programs in the works. "The first in May or June will be about the major fires in town... and we have had some big ones," says Docter. While many likely remember the kitchen fire that tragically leveled the 132-year-old Riverside Inn in 2017, local history aficionados also likely know the story of the massive 500-room Hotel Rider (then part of Alliance College) and its 1931 demise.

"In addition, we are in the process of scrutinizing the collection to determine the items that best show our history and what needs to be removed," Docter adds. "We are in an ongoing process of securing archival materials to protect photographs and vintage clothing. With the clothing stored properly, new exhibits can be developed in those freed-up spaces."

Docter also says that they have been working to combine their four postcard binders (totaling nearly 1,800 postcards) into one and sell off their duplicates. Vice President Vikki Hendrickson adds that this is being accomplished by volunteers as well as through a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission for Historical and Archival Records. She also highlights that they have a historical display case located at Cambridge Springs Pharmacy which they change every two or three months.

If you speak with those who help keep our local museums operating, you cannot miss their passion. Of course, passion alone doesn't pay the bills or fund projects. In a 2012 article for the American Historical

Association, Debbie Ann Doyle described how most of these small town organizations and museums are "tiny, underfunded, and understaffed."

"[M]any societies simply don't have the resources to update their exhibits or conservation practices," she wrote. "Declining attendance at history museums may be one consequence of this inability to update interpretation and programming."

This is not a new worry. As far back as 1925, scholar James O. Knauss was discussing the importance of "collection and preservation" for accessible archives and the importance of public support.

"[If people] cannot be roused to a sense of their value, they will inevitably disappear, and the reconstruction of our past in accurate detail will be almost impossible," stressed Knauss. "It is right here that the fundamental importance of historical societies lies. They can and must teach our citizens the imperative need of locating, collecting, and preserving such material."

Despite this, with what resources and volunteers that they do have, our local historical societies and museums are doing wonders. Swing by the Union City Museum and you'll witness the labor of love in their two floors of exhibits and displays. Talk with those at the Fort LeBoeuf Historical Museum and you'll leave knowing more about flint knapping or 18th-century gardening than you could have ever imagined. Take a ride out to Albion to see work that the Elk Creek Township Historical Society is doing on the Little Church on the Hill and prepare to be amazed.

Whether it's the Hagen History Center, the Baldwin Reynolds House Museum, or smaller communities such as Edinboro, Fairview, Girard, Harborcreek, Lawrence Park, Saegertown, Titusville, Wattsburg, or even across the states lines into Ohio and New York, supporting our many local history museums is not only fun and fascinating, but also essential for their survival.

"In a long term goal, it's our desire to have more of an interactive experience for visitors and to create experiences to get more visitors through the door [of the Cambridge Springs Museum]," says Docter. "As we stand, we don't have enough visitors to offset the expense that would be incurred to make interactive a reality. Still, it is worth investigating our options."

Fortunately, those who do know and already engage with the local museums are often just as passionate. As Clark is eager to point, she is grateful for the "wonderful support of the community ... and the great work by the numerous volunteers."

"We can answer just about any question anyone can ask about the yesterdays of North East," Tefft concludes — a sentiment that can likely be echoed throughout our historical societies and museums. So whether it's by simply visiting and sharing our experiences with others, donating or making a purchase in their gift shops, or volunteering our time to help in whatever way that we can, it's up to all of us to keep the attics of our towns open and accessible so that our stories may continue to be passed on.

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

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10th Annual Best of Erie 2023 Winners and Finalists

A decade of your favorite people, places, and things in Erie

By: Erie Reader Staff

This year, the Erie Reader is celebrating 10 years of Best of Erie — 10 years of providing a platform for the people of Erie to give a public boost to their favorite local businesses, locally made food, artists, practitioners, spaces, and places. Unlike other local “contests,” Best of Erie has, and always will be, derived from the people who take the time to vote. It is truly a crowdsourced list; there are no advertisement dollars swaying the numbers here. And this list is important to local businesses. The results become the basis of our yearly City Guide, which is compiled from each year’s Best of Erie list and helps tourists and visitors to Erie get a sense of the businesses we hold in highest regard.

There have been some local establishments or artists who have swept their particular category every year the past decade and these are listed in a special shout-out list below — Erie is unwavering in their support of these places and that kind of lasting loyalty is special. Other categories have different winners every year, oftentimes in a tight race showing just how much growth, diversity, and new talent Erie has.

So without further ado, here they are — the winners of our 10th Annual Best of Erie Awards! We hope that you agree with the majority of Erie voters that this is a great representation of our region. And if you don’t agree, we hope that you’ll take the time to nominate and vote in 2024.

Runners-up listed in order of vote total

GOODS AND SERVICES

Best Local Business

Winner: Romolo Chocolates

Runners-up: Erie Humane Society, Bro-Man’s Sammiches

Best New Business (Within Last Two Years)

Winner: Werner Books and Coffee

Runners-up: Flagship City Market and Erie Food Co-op, Rosco’s Sports Bar and Grill

Best Locally Made Product

Winners: Smith Hot Dogs

Runners-up: Romolo Chocolates, Mighty Fine Donuts

Best Car Dealership

Winner: Bianchi Honda

Runners-up: Auto Express KIA / Mazda, New Motors Subaru / VW / BMW

Best Bank

Winner: Erie Federal Credit Union

Runners-up: PNC Bank, Northwest Bank

Best Antique / Consignment Shop

Winner: The Sassy Peacock

Runners-up: Cobb’s Second Time Around Thrift Shop,



From nonprofits to hot dogs: Erie’s goods and services are what define who we are as a city. (Clockwise from top left): Werner Books and Coffee (featured herein) won both Best New Business and Best Bookstore this year; Nothing beats a Smith’s Hot Dog and that’s a fact; Romolo Chocolates has swept the Best Chocolates category for 10 years straight; And the ANNA Shelter has done the same in Best Place to Adopt a Pet.

The Thrifty Shopper

Runners-up: Panache Salon and Spa, Ambridge Rose

Best Boutique

Winner: Grasshopper

Runners-up: Glass Growers Gallery, Lollie & Co.

Best Beauty Salon

Winner: Panache Salon and Spa

Runners-up: Moxi Hair Salon, Coventina Day and Medical Spa

Best Jewelry Store

Winner: Dahlkemper’s Jewelry Connection

Runners-up: Breakiron Jewelers, Sacred Piercing

Best Dog Groomer

Winner: Paws and Claws

Runners-up: Buzz n’ B’s, Mud Puppies

Best Furniture Store

Winner: John V. Schultz Furniture & Mattress

Runners-up: Arthur F Schultz Company, Seifert’s House of Furniture

Best Place to Adopt a Pet

Winner: ANNA Shelter

Runners-up: Erie Humane Society, Because You Care

Best Local Book Store

Winner: Werner Books and Coffee

Runners-up: Pressed Books & Coffee, Books Galore

Best Bike Shop

Winner: 814 Outdoor Sports

Runners-up: John Adams Cycling & Fitness, Competitive Gear

Best Barbershop

Winner: Ruiz Barbershop

Runners-up: V’s Barber Shop, Colony Barber Shop

Best Auto Repair Shop

Winner: Bonnell’s Collision Center

Runners-up: Bianchi Honda, Kerr’s Tire Korner

Best Spa

Winner: Coventina Day and Med Spa

Best Web Developer

BEST OF ERIE

Winner: Epic Web Studios

Runners-up: Erie Multimedia, Amanda Weber

Best Graphic Designer

Winner: Brink Ink

Runners-up: Kevin Fellows (Iron Empire), Marlee Malpiedi

Best Advertising Agency

Winner: 814 Digital

Runners-up: R Frank Media, Epic Web Studios

Best Law Firm

Winner: MacDonald, Illig, Jones & Britton

Runners-up: Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett, P.C., Quinn Law Firm

Best Real Estate Agency

Winner: Agresti Real Estate Agency

Runners-up: Howard Hanna Agency, Marsha Marsh Real Estate Services

Best Bed and Breakfast

Winner: Victoria Inn Bed & Breakfast

Runners-up: Spencer House Bed & Breakfast, The Victoria On Main

Best Tattoo Parlor

Winner: Wayward Tattoo Studio

Runners-up: InkXspression, Buddha's

Best Florist

Winner: Potratz Floral Shop & Greenhouses, Inc.

Runners-up: Allburn Florist, Gerlach's Garden & Floral

Best Greenhouse

Winner: Stan's Garden Center

Runners-up: Mason Farms, Potratz Floral Shop & Greenhouses

Best Place to Camp

Winner: Sparrow Pond Family Campground

Runners-up: Sara's Campground, Camp Sherwin (YMCA of Greater Erie)

Best Neighborhood Grocer

Winner: Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meat

Runners-up: Gordon's Butcher & Market, Bello's Shur-Fine Food Mart

Best Landscaper

Winner: Gerlach's

Runners-up: Dahlkemper Landscape Architects & Contractors, J J Wurst Landscape Contractors and Garden Center

Best Electrician

Winner: Church & Murdock Electric Inc.

Runners-up: Dobrich Electric, Hilbrich Electric JE

Best Plumber

Winner: TJ's Plumbing & Heating of Erie, Inc.

Runners-up: Wm T Spaeder, Reeves

ERIN PHILLIPS, ANDREW DALTON, JESSICA HUNTER



Erie's art, culture, and nightlife scenes have always been packed full of local talent and great institutions and this year is no exception. (Clockwise from top left): Winner of Best Museum this year is the newly renovated and expanded expERIENCE Children's Museum; Repeat winner for Best MC CEE Brown always brings the beats; Oliver's Beer Garden wins again for best patio – who can beat that view?; Glass Growers Gallery is a creative Erie staple, taking home the win for Best Gallery.

Best Residential Roofer

Winner: Angelo's Roofing

Runners-up: Brink Roofing, Dougherty Contracting

Best General Contractor

Winner: Father and Son Remodeling

Runners-up: Great Lakes Home Solutions, Matt Krol Construction

Best Pet Daycare

Winner: Paws 'n Claws

Runners-up: Peninsula Pups, Buzz n' Bees

Best HVAC

Winner: J.J. Agnello Heating & Cooling

Runners-up: TJ's Plumbing & Heating of Erie, Nerthling's Heating & Air Conditioning

Best Production Company

Winner: WQLN

Runners-up: R Frank Media, Erie Promotions

Best Med Spa

Winner: Coventina Day and Medical Spa

Runners-up: Massage Envy, Rejuv

Best Dispensary

Winner: Rise Erie

Runners-up: Curaleaf, Sunny Side

CULTURE & NIGHTLIFE

Best Museum

Winner: expERIENCE Children's Museum

Runners-up: Erie Art Museum, Tom Ridge Environmental Center

Best Art Gallery

Winner: Glass Growers Gallery

Runners-up: PACA, City Gallery

Best Community Theater

Winner: Erie Playhouse

Runners-up: PACA, Mercyhurst Institute for Arts and Culture (MIAC)

Best Dance School

Winner: Long's School of Dance

Runners-up: Little Dance Studio, Marguerite's Academy of Dance

Best Photographer

Winner: Katie Mihalak Photography

Runners-up: R Frank Media, Lorei Photography

Best Visual Artist

Winner: Adam Stempka

Runners-up: Kaitlyn Page, Erie Eric Fargiorgio

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JESSICA HUNTER



Erie's food scene grows bigger and more interesting every year. (Clockwise from top left): Sweeping a number of categories this year, Chef Stephen Sanbro of Bro Man's Sammiches – winner of Best Chef – is cooking up winner after winner; Awarded in both the Best Taco and Best Mexican Restaurant categories, Downtown Erie's El Amigo is *el mejor*; Best Brewery goes to the hometown favorite, Lavery Brewing Company; Mighty Fine is always a crowd pleaser.

Best Band (Original)

Winner: Eric Brewer & Friends

Runners-up: Smilo & The Ghost, Six Year Stretch

Best New Band/Musician (Last Two Years)

Winner: Sarah Everhart

Runners-up: Do Not Call List, Abigail (Abby Barrett-Cieslak)

Best Cover Band

Winner: The Groove

Runners-up: Geek Army, First to Eleven

Best Vocalist

Winner: Lindsay Vendetti

Runners-up: Audra Miller, Brooke Surgener

Best MC

Winner: CEE Brown

Runners-up: Jonny Evans, Dezy Call

Best Instrumentalist

Winner: Eric Brewer

Runners-up: Abby Barrett, Ron Yarosz

Best DJ

Winner: DJ Bill Page

Runners-up: Erie Wedding & Event Services, Tony Beraducci

Best Irish Pub

Winner: McGarrey's Oakwood Cafe

Runners-up: Sullivan's, Lavery Brewing Co.

Best Patio

Winner: Oliver's Beer Garden

Runners-up: Pier 6 Rooftop Bar, Rum Runners

Best Festival

Winner: Celebrate Erie

Runners-up: Peek'n Peak Fall Fest, Zabawa Polish Festival

Best Music Series

Winner: 8 Great Tuesdays

Runners-up: Celebrate Erie, Sunset Music Series

FOOD & DRINK

Best Restaurant

Winner: Pineapple Eddie Southern Bistro

Runners-up: Federal Hill Smokehouse, Bar Ronin

Best New Restaurant (Within Last Two Years)

Winner: Bro Man's Sammiches

Runners-up: Rosco's Sports Bar and Grill, Colony Pizza & Catering

Best Chef

Winner: Stephen Stanbro (Bro Man's Sammiches)

Runners-up: Jean Paul (Pineapple Eddie Southern Bistro), Martin Firestone (Firestone's)

Best Bakery

Winner: Art's Bakery

Runners-up: Mighty Fine, Ye Olde Sweet Shoppe

Best Coffee Shop

Winner: Tippy Bean Cafe

Runners-up: Brew Haha at the Colony, Ember + Forge

Best Ice Cream Shop

Winner: Straw Hat

Runners-up: Whippy Dip, Creamland

Best Chocolates or Candy

Winner: Romolo Chocolates

Runners-up: Pulakos Chocolates, Stefanelli's Candies

Best Donut Shop

Winner: Mighty Fine Donuts

Runners-up: H & K Donut Shop, Little Shop of Donuts

Best Dinor

Winner: Gem City Dinor

Runners-up: The Dinor at Lawrence Park, Flip Cafe

Best Brunch

Winner: Flip Cafe

Runners-up: Gem City Dinor, The Breakfast Place

Best Brewery

Winner: Lavery Brewing Co.

Runners-up: Erie Brewing Company, Voodoo Brewing Company

Best Locally Made Beer

Winner: Railbender (Erie Brewing Company)

Runners-up: Dulachan (Lavery Brewing Co.), Good Vibes (Voodoo Brewing Company)

Best Winery

Winner: Arundel Cellars & Brewing Co.

Runners-up: Mazza Vineyards, Heritage Wine Cellars

Best Distillery

Winner: Altered State Distillery

Runners-up: Luminary Distilling, Fuhrman's Cider, Eatery; Erie Distillery

Best Bar Food

Winner: Odis 12

Runners-up: Plymouth Tavern, BIGBAR

Best Sandwich Shop

Winner: Picasso's

Runners-up: Bro Man's Sammiches, Teresa's Italian Deli

Best Deli

Winner: Teresa's Italian Deli

Runners-up: Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meats, Gordon's Butcher & Market

Best Burger

BEST OF ERIE

Winner: Bro Man's Sammiches

Runners-up: Odis 12, BIGBAR

Best Pizzeria

Winner: John's Wildwood Pizza

Runners-up: Valerio's Italian Restaurant & Pizzeria, Sticks & Bricks Wood Fired Pizza

Best Wings

Winner: Odis 12

Runners-up: Park Tavern, One Way Inn

Best Sushi

Winner: Samurai Kitchen + Sushi

Runners-up: Bar Ronin, Ichiban

Best Food Truck

Winner: Bro Man's Sammiches

Runners-up: Que Abides, A Waffle Miracle

Best Place for Vegan or Vegetarian Food

Winner: Erie Food Co-op

Runners-up: The Juice Jar, Like My Thai

Best Barbecue Restaurant

Winner: Federal Hill Smokehouse

Runners-up: Underdog BBQ, Outlaw Barbecue Revolution

Best Seafood Restaurant

Winner: Smuggler's Wharf

Runners-up: Pineapple Eddie Southern Bistro, Bay House Oyster Bar & Restaurant

Best Asian Restaurant

Winner: Samurai Kitchen + Sushi

Runners-up: Like My Thai, Imperial Buffet

Best Italian Restaurant

Winner: Valerio's Italian Restaurant & Pizzeria

Runners-up: Mi Scuzi, Colao's

Best Mexican Restaurant

Winner: El Amigo Mexican Grill

Runners-up: El Canelo, Torero's

Best Mediterranean or Middle Eastern Restaurant

Winner: Bistro 26

Runners-up: Habibi, Casablanca Grill

Best Caterer

Winner: Teresa's Italian Deli

Runners-up: Cali's West, Calamari's

Best Waterfront Dining

Winner: Oliver's Rooftop & Beer Garden

Runners-up: Pier 6 Rooftop Bar & Grill, Sloppy Duck Saloon

Best Romantic Restaurant

Winner: Oliver's Rooftop

Runners-up: The Cork 1794, Mi Scuzi

Best Health Food Store

JESSICA HUNTER, ERIE OTTERS HOCKEY



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Winner: Erie Food Co-op

Runners-up: Juice Jar, Chicory Hill Herbs

Best Bar

Winner: Plymouth Tavern

Runners-up: BIGBAR, Odis 12

Best Taco

Winner: El Amigo Mexican Grill

Runners-up: El Canelo, Bro Man's Sammiches

PEOPLE & PLACES

Best Place to Work

Winner: Erie Insurance

Runners-up: UPMC Hamot, Erie Federal Credit Union

Best Place for a First Date

Winner: Presque Isle State Park

Runners-up: Oliver's Rooftop, The Cork 1794

Best Place to Take Your Dog

Winner: Presque Isle State Park

Runners-up: Frontier Park, Asbury Woods

Best Radio Station

Winner: 92.7 Happi

Runners-up: 103.7 Star 104, 104.9 Rocket 105

Best Radio Personality (or Radio Team)

Winner: Sammy Stone

Runners-up: Jessica Curry Carlson, Mojo & A.C.

Best TV Personality

Winner: Tom Atkins

Runners-up: Sean Lafferty, John Stehlin

Best Filmmaker

Winner: Chronicles (WQLN/PBS)

Runners-up: Jesse James, Double Tap Productions

Best Yoga Space

Winner: yogaErie

Runners-up: Barefoot Buddha, PACA Movement Center

Best Tattoo Artist

Winner: Rachel Travis (Steadfast Tattoo)

Runners-up: Jake Miller (Ink Assassins), Johnny Matters (Wayward Tattoo)

Best Theatrical Performer

Winner: Adele Crotty

Runners-up: Kate Thiem, Brandon Vogt

Best Nonprofit

Winner: The ANNA Shelter

Runners-up: Shriners Children's Erie, Erie Zoo

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Best University

Winner: Penn State Behrend

Runners-up: Gannon University, Mercyhurst University

Best Fitness Club

Winner: Planet Fitness

Runners-up: YMCA, FitnessU

Best Bowling Alley

Winner: Greengarden Lanes

Runners-up: Eastway Lanes, Rolling Meadow Lanes

Best Team to Root for

Winner: Erie Otters

Runners-up: Erie SeaWolves, Erie Roller Derby

Best Lawyer

Winner: Jim Toohey (MacDonald, Illig, Jones & Britton)

Runners-up: Christine McClure (Knox Law Firm), Chad Vilushis (McCormick & Vilushis)

Best Dentist

Winner: Dr. David Demarco

Runners-up: Beautiful Smiles, Dr. Carla Orlando

Best Golf Course

Winner: Whispering Woods Golf Club

Runners-up: Mound Grove Golf Course, Lawrence Park Golf Club

Best Real Estate Agent

Winner: Jake Scheloske (Agresti Real Estate)

Runners-up: Max Rankin, Carol Dabrowski

Best Local Entrepreneur(s)

Winner: Michael Miodus (Odis 12 Bar and Grill)

Runners-up: Jason and Nicole Lavery (Lavery Brewing Company), Tony Stefanelli (Romolo Chocolates)

Best Podcast

Winner: Idiotville: Erie, PA's Favorite Podcast

Runners-up: Spotlight 814, 2 Man Happy Hour

Best Hiking Trails

Winner: Wintergreen Gorge

Runners-up: Asbury Woods, Presque Isle State Park

Best Park

Winner: Presque Isle State Park

Runners-up: Frontier Park, Asbury Woods

Best Outdoor Adventure Activity

Winner: Presque Isle State Park

Runners-up: Erie Zoo, Scallywags Pirate Adventures

Best Wedding Venue

Winner: Port Farms

Runners-up: Warner Theatre, Peek'n Peak Resort

Best Veterinary Practice

Winner: Glenwood Pet Hospital

Runners-up: The ANNA Shelter, Erie Animal Hospital

Best Athletic Competition

Winner: Barber Beast on the Bay

Runners-up: Save an Eye Game, Erie Roller Derby

Best Heritage Festival

Winner: Zabawa Polish Heritage Festival

Runners-up: Panegyri Greek Festival, Erie Irish Festival

Best Doctor/PCP

Winner: Dr. Christine (Brown) Agnello

Runners-up: Dr. Pamela Beck, Dr. Brian J. Stark

Best Physical Therapist

Winner: Greg Kuzma (Ashley & Kuzma Therapeutics)

Runners-up: Mary Eighmy (Shriners Children's Erie), Elizabeth Darling (Rise Up Physical Therapy)

Best Mental Health Professional

Winner: Safe Harbor Behavioral Health

Runners-up: Journey to a Trauma Informed Life, Catholic Charities Counseling and Adoption Service

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BEST OF ERIE

10-Time Winners in Their Respective Categories

Some businesses and places have swept their individual categories for 10 years straight and we at the Reader feel like they deserve special recognition for their consistency, great customer service, and quality throughout the years. Congratulations! (Listed alphabetically by category)

- Best Athletic Competition:** Barber Beast on the Bay
- Best Bakery:** Art's Bakery
- Best Bank:** Erie Federal Credit Union
- Best Bowling Alley:** Greengarden Lanes
- Best Car Dealership:** Bianchi Honda
- Best Chocolates or Candy:** Romolo Chocolates
- Best Consignment Shop:** Sassy Peacock
- Best Health Food Store:** Erie Food Co-op
- Best Park:** Presque Isle State Park
- Best Place to Adopt a Pet:** The ANNA Shelter
- Best Salon:** Panache
- Best Spa:** Coventina Day Spa
- Best Team to Root For:** Erie Otters
- Best University:** Penn State Behrend
- Best Web Developer:** Epic Web Studios
- Best Yoga Studio:** YogaERIE

JESSICA HUNTER, PENN STATE BEHREND; PANACHE SALON AND SPA



Among those Best of Erie winners who have swept their individual categories for 10 years straight, we'd love to congratulate (from top): our jewel on the lake, Presque Isle State Park which has won Best Park since 2014, Penn State Behrend which has taken home the win for Best Local University, Panache Salon and Spa, who has styled their way to the top in Best Salon for 10 years running.



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You're Never a Stranger at the Beer Mug: Remembering Paul Fiorelli

Local musicians and friends share memory of beloved bar owner

By: Larry Wheaton

One of Erie's most important supporters of local music has passed away — Paul Fiorelli, at the age of 63. Fiorelli, affectionately known as Paulie, co-owned the Beer Mug, a corner bar that often hosted local independent music acts, with his wife Sandy. They opened in 1981 and about eight years later, they began encouraging local bands to perform. From the outside the building seemed like a normal Erie neighborhood bar on Liberty Street. However this local hangout was actually Erie's answer to CBGB's, a place where punks could run free, freaks could fly their flags, locals could get a cold drink, and artists of all walks of life could perform their music.

When other locations started closing their doors in the late '90s, the Mug rolled into the new millennium as the go-to local music venue. At times these shows were so packed, often shoulder-to-shoulder, that it was easier to exit through the back door where the bands loaded-in and enter through the front door to get a refill on your drink. This year will be nine years since one of Erie's most important independent music venues closed its doors.

Looking back at Fiorelli and the Beer Mug, the number of local bands that graced that small stage in the back of the house is staggering. For 25 years, Rodger Montgomery hosted a jam on Sunday nights. National touring acts like Easy Action, The Jazz Butcher, Cattle Decapitation, and Oneida (just to name a few) found a home at the Mug while they were on tour and needed a stop between Cleveland, Pittsburgh, or Buffalo. The Cattle Decapitation shows were set up by booking agent Alex Harilla who picked them up after a Pittsburgh show was canceled, and due to the size of the venue, attendees were actually able to meet and hang

"Paulie was present as an owner. He was at the shows, he was there for support, and he paid fairly. He ran his bar and bands in an organized way, within a chaotic atmosphere. He was always involved in the mayhem."
—Carlos Rivera, local musician

out with the band. This writer recalls talking with the singer Travis Ryan after they performed. He mentioned how much fun it was to play a smaller, jam-packed venue, and that the energy was palpable. This was a sentiment that was repeated by many acts over the years.

One of the biggest shows the Beer Mug hosted was the Jazz Butcher/Conspiracy show, which took place on April 16, 2000. Show promoter James Welle reflects on why he chose the Mug for this memorable event,



The Beer Mug began hosting live acts in 1989 and the bar's proprietor, Paul Fiorelli, constantly supported the independent local music scene until the bar closed its doors in 2015.

"They had a gig canceled in Jamestown and I had been booking shows at all the bars for the last few years and the Beer Mug was one of my favorites." Welle continues, "Paulie was always fair and if he had an open night would let me take it. Of all the places I would book, Paul treated me and the bands the best. The vibe of the Mug was always special."

This sentiment was echoed by Carlos Rivera who started playing at the Mug in the '90s with his band the Mollies and continued to play hundreds of shows over the years with his bands Mala Sangre, Sonic Medusa, and The Trashed. Rivera said, "Paulie was present as an owner. He was at the shows, he was there for support, and he paid fairly. He ran his bar and bands in an organized way, within a chaotic atmosphere. He was always involved in the mayhem." Rivera continues, "He gave us a venue to express ourselves. He never censored you, or put restrictions on bands. When other Erie bars were not allowing original bands to play, Paulie welcomed us with open arms. All he cared about was that folks were having fun, drinking, and dancing at the Beer Mug."

Friend and former bartender at the Beer Mug, Melissa Sullivan-Shimek spoke fondly about her time working with Paulie and his sense of humor. She started hanging out at the Mug in the late '80s when they first hosted live music, and recalls playing there with her band T Nougat. She eventually started bartending there in the early 2000s. Sullivan-Shimek recalls, "I especially remember how packed and out of control Pegasus Uni-

corn shows would get. I always looked forward to Paul jumping in with a band to sing a few lyrics of a Stones song or dancing behind the bar to "Shattered" on the jukebox." Taking the mic and singing "She's So Cold" with Sonic Medusa was inevitable. Rivera concurred, "He would regularly grab the mic to show his admiration for the bands and folks that attended. He'd give a speech and then break out into a classic Sinatra num-



Paul Fiorelli was always a welcoming and familiar face to those who enjoyed live music at the Beer Mug. He often got on stage before the night was over to voice his admiration for the support of the local music scene and sing a few bars. Fiorelli recently passed away at age 63.

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FEATURE

ERIN PHILLIPS



The attendees of local rock shows at the Beer Mug can attest to their frenetic energy – people were often packed in, shoulder to shoulder, to enjoy their favorite local bands.

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ber. He was quite the vocalist.”

The aforementioned Pegasus Unicorn shows in the early 2000s were part of the early Basement Transmissions scene that included local bands like Black Rose Diary, Telefonics, The Trashed, the Killerinas, and Dirt McGurtt on the label's roster. Pegasus Unicorn was one of the biggest local indie bands at the time, at one point having a chance to work with famed industrial musician Martin Atkins. Pegasus Unicorn musician Bob Jensen has since continued the Basement Transmissions label as a successful all-ages music venue in Erie.

Speaking of his time in the band and working with Fiorelli, Jensen said, “I loved Paul so much. He always treated me and the Pegasus Unicorn gang so well. I had my first beer when I turned 21 at the Beer Mug.” After Pegasus Unicorn played their first show there Jensen said that Fiorelli took notice and let them set up more shows right away. “My favorite memory of Paulie was actually not at the Mug,” Jensen reflects. “He was at a clambake that Pegasus played. Paul was right there in the front singing and he almost felt like a member of the band. Singing and putting his arms around us as we played. He was hugely influential to me personally.” This type of behavior is rare in a club owner — to know the songs that local bands were writing, and to be able to sing along.

“Morbid” Rob Burke of the local thrash punk band Maniacal Device hosted his annual birthday show at the Beer Mug. He would often book the bar for two straight days and highlight Erie's best punk, metal, and indie bands. Burke began playing the Beer Mug with The Go Go Rays in the '90s and continued on to play there

with his bands The Trashed, Sound City Saints, and My Three Scum. The My Three Scum 20th anniversary show was one of those intensely packed nights — the band was being pushed back against the far wall from so many people dancing.

Of all the bands that Burke played with at the Beer Mug, The Trashed were one of Paulie's favorites. Burke said, “He once told the crowd The Trashed was the Erie rock equivalent of the Yankees... high praise from him.” The Yankees were Paulie's favorite baseball team, and the bar was filled with sports memorabilia from the Yankees, Browns, Bruins, and Bucks.

After 34 years in the business, Paul and Sandy Fiorelli sold the Beer Mug to Rick Weaver Buick GMC, who demolished the building in 2015 to expand their parking lot. The final weekend of shows at the Mug were packed with old friends and familiar faces gathering one last time to pay homage to a club that meant so much to them.

Carlos Rivera was fortunate enough to play both nights on the closing weekend with Mala Sangre and Sonic Medusa. Rivera recalls, “It was a mix of emotions. I was honored to play both closing nights, but was saddened by the closure of the Mug. After 30 years, hundreds of shows, and all the memories — it was tough.”

The Beer Mug proprietor Paul Fiorelli was 63 when he passed away on Dec. 16, 2023 at UPMC Hamot.

Larry Wheaton started going to the Beer Mug in the early 2000s and had the pleasure to play there in the bands The Go Go Rays, Telefonics, and This American Song. He can be reached at wheaton1138@gmail.com

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Gem City Style: Werner Books and Coffee

An interview with Lauren Shoemaker and Kyle Churman

By: Jessica Hunter

Jessica Hunter (JH): Tell us a little bit about Werner Books and Coffee and how you got started in the book business.

Lauren Shoemaker (LS): We've both been readers our whole lives. Knowing books has been the easy part — I taught middle school language arts and now teach at Slippery Rock University. Kyle has been in different sales positions over the years, too.

Kyle Churman (KC): I spent years working in college admissions, which is essentially sales and marketing, before taking a corporate accounts role with WQLN. That position allowed me to get more connected with both the Erie business world and the nonprofit community. Gayle Werner's stewardship of Werner Books and her willingness to train me made for a seamless transition. We were also able to keep the entire staff who have been essential to our success.

LS: We were prepared to build this from the positions we had before, even if we didn't know it at the time. Being in education and nonprofits helped us understand the multiple roles that a small business has in a community outside of supporting itself.

JH: This has been an exciting year for you and your business. You were both recently honored in Erie's 2023 40 Under 40 cohort. Werner Books & Coffee just won Best New Business (Within Last Two Years) as well as Best Local Bookstore in this issue's Best of Erie Awards, and you just moved into a new space and added a coffee shop.

At a time when independent bookstores battle for survival, it takes a lot of passion, courage and possible sacrifice to run a bookstore. What has been the biggest challenge and what has been the biggest surprise about running a bookstore?

KC: Thank you! 2023 was a very special year for us! There were many conversations about whether or not this was even viable, but after our first year, we knew that an expansion was not just possible, but needed in Erie. One of our biggest challenges was making sure that we could not only afford the expansion, but also grow the business in the future. However, our risk has paid off because we feel we've created a great space for people to meet, gather, work, and read. The lack of third spaces (i.e., places encouraging social interaction outside the bubbles of home or work) in Erie was concerning to us and we hope that we are contributing to their resurgence.

LS: This shouldn't have been a surprise, but I was surprised by how much Erie and visitors to Erie appreciate used books. People want to be sustainable and economical about their reading habits. The library is likely an avid readers' first choice — and we're big fans! — but used bookstores are a close second. It's important to be transparent about us too; I've kept my full-time job through the expansion. My nights and weekends here are my side hustle.

JH: With a physical product like the books you sell, how do you keep pace in our digital world?

KC: Everyone has different reading habits and we

JESSICA HUNTER



Kyle Churman and Lauren Shoemaker, co-owners of Werner Books and Coffee, spoke with Jessica Hunter about the massive year they've just had: winning multiple Best of Erie categories, being featured in Erie's 40 Under 40, and completing a move, expansion, and addition of a coffee bar to their bookstore.

have found that most people still love having a physical book in their hands. Customers also seek out the expertise and recommendations of our incredible staff because an algorithm can only tell you so much about what you might like.

LS: Lots of people listen to audiobooks, too. Libro.fm is an app that supports local independent bookstores through audiobook purchases. All of your Erie bookstores are on there as options. Sure, digital books and readers are popular, but fewer people want to look at yet another screen in their free time.

JH: When I step through your doors, I can feel the welcoming atmosphere that you have created. I understand why you call yourself "Erie's community bookstore." Can you shed some light on what services and events you offer our community and how you continue

"People want to be sustainable and economical about their reading habits. The library is likely an avid readers' first choice — and we're big fans! — but used bookstores are a close second."
 —Lauren Shoemaker, Co-Owner

to stay connected with the community?

LS: My first instinct was to use our space to support literacy education and opportunities in Erie. Preschool story time, book giveaways, and eventually writing programming have been priorities for us. We were very

lucky to connect with United Way Community School Director Sara Musone at Grover Cleveland Elementary in our neighborhood, and we're always eager to collaborate. This fall we expanded to bring 15 students from the three Erie public middle schools to participate in WITS (Writers in the Schools) with creative writing students and residents from Slippery Rock.

We hosted writers participating in National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) in November, and Jayna Deniziak, teaching artist, offers writing instruction through Words with Friends twice a month. Word artist Mabel Howard hosts The Poetry X-change on the second Sunday of every month. We host *many* book clubs which are open to the public; Kyle and I run two of them, but there are so many we couldn't do it without help from staff and community members. Most of these are at the store, but some are on location with our partners, like the Hagen History Center and Erie Ale Works for Books and Beers.

KC: As much as we love our space, we always enjoy getting outside of our four walls and into the community. School book fairs are a major part of our community business model and we work with schools all over Erie and Crawford counties to provide affordable books to their students. We also have been attending the LEAF Open Markets for the past two summers and were even able to set up a craft and storytime tent for families attending the markets. Through these pop-up markets, we have met a lot of vendors and makers whose wares we have been able to have for sale in the store. We even went as far as purchasing a small bus so we can attend more markets and carry more books throughout the

JESSICA HUNTER



The recent expansion of Werner Books within the Liberty Plaza has allowed the store to include an improved children's literature section with cozy seating, a fun tent, and chalkboard wall which is co-owner Lauren Shoemaker's favorite new space.

community.

JH: If you could invite any author for a book signing at Werner Books & Coffee, who would you choose?

KC: We love hosting our local authors at the store for events and I recently had a conversation with my sales rep at Simon and Schuster who mentioned I should try to get Brenna Thummler to do a signing at our store. I had to tell him we already have! And not only did she design our new logo, but we see her weekly before she records her podcast *Spotlight 814*. If I could have anyone else in our store, I'd have to say Emily Henry or Ann Patchett because I adore them and their books.

LS: This is tough! I agree with Brenna and would add Emily St. John Mandel and Marlon James.

JH: What's your favorite section of the store? If you had to pick only ONE book to be your greatest treasure what would it be?

LS: I love the chalk wall in the kids section, especially when someone gets a poll going. The book that's my greatest treasure would be the mash-up of *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* that I recounted around a campfire for some friends a few years ago. I love those two books but obviously can't keep them perfectly straight!

KC: I want to say my favorite spot is the couch, but I love greeting customers when they walk through the front door so I'd have to say the front desk. My favorite book is *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* which is the only book I re-read year after year.

Werner Books is located in the Liberty Plaza at 3608 Liberty St. or at wernerbooks.com

Jessica Hunter can be found at jessicahunterphotos.com

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Laying the Groundwork for Lake Erie Water Conservation

Groundwork Erie initiatives focus on local breweries

By: Amy VanScoter

If there is one thing that Erie residents tend to agree on, it's their love of Lake Erie. Although water quality in the lake has come a long way, there is still much work to be done with protecting and conserving Lake Erie's water.

The 2022 State of the Great Lakes Report assessed Lake Erie as "Poor and Unchanging," making special note of elevated nutrient concentrations and algal blooms being persistent problems. Lake Erie drinking water however, is assessed as "Good" and a source of safe, high-quality drinking water.

That's good news if you're drinking the water, but have you ever thought about how this connects with the beer you're drinking? Maybe not, but for some Gannon students, the connection has been a lesson not just in water quality but also water conservation.

Brianna Bagley, a business administration student at Gannon University, is one of the students who is working with Groundwork Erie on a water conservation project that takes a close look at our local breweries. "We began brainstorming about which local businesses have a large dependence on water and the brewing industry jumped right out at us," said Bagley. "The quality of the water going into the brewing process can really make the difference between a good brew and a great brew."

Bagley said the students conducted significant research on the successful brewing industry here locally and elsewhere with online research outlining the destructive habits that can often take place during the brewing process (such as energy and water consumption and the production of wastewater, solid waste and by-products, and emissions) and how this can affect the environment. As the process continued, the students began partnering with Groundwork Erie, a non-profit organization that employs and empowers youth like Bagley in constructing green infrastructure, while also educating communities about the significance of clean water, specifically focusing on Lake Erie.

This initiative not only emphasizes the importance of pristine water for environmental health but also highlights its significance in the production of one of Erie's



The recent focus of local sustainability group Groundwork Erie's has shifted to water quality, specifically how Erie's water quality affects the brewing industry. Local brewers like Erie Ale Works depend on high quality drinking water to maintain the integrity of their beers.

most renowned products — beer.

Aaron Kerr, Ph.D., executive director of Groundwork Erie, says the importance of this initiative is simple. "If you drink water in Erie, you can invest in the lake's health by supporting water conservation work throughout the city. If you like to drink beer, and want beer quality to remain consistent, you can support water conservation efforts by drinking local beer," said Kerr.

Kerr likens it to a circular economy which favors activities that preserve value in the form of energy, labor, and materials; designing for durability, reuse, remanufacturing, and recycling to keep products, components, and materials circulating in the economy.

Groundwork Erie is working to undo legacies of poverty and racial discrimination by pursuing a future in which everyone's neighborhood environment is green,

healthy, and resilient.

"We raised \$4,289 this year from Erie Gives and community events," shared Kerr. "That \$4,289 will allow us to employ two youth at a competitive wage to do conservation work in the summer of 2024. Our goal for 2024 is to invite 200 people to donate \$200 each. This will enable us to employ and train 15 youth in urban conservation and renewal."

The Groundwork Erie board, representatives of the Erie Ale Trail, and Craig Palmer of Erie Water Works were recently on hand as the students presented their research and business plan to gain more support for Groundwork Erie. If you'd like to learn more about their initiatives and how you can get involved check out their website at groundworkerie.com

Amy VanScoter can be reached at avanscoter@gmail.com





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Open Studios at Grounded Printshop

Providing a communal space for creative people and projects

CONTINUING TUESDAY, JAN. 16

Every Tuesday, the local print and papermaking space Grounded Printshop hosts their Open Studios. The purpose of the weekly event is to provide a space for individuals to use the facility's equipment and work on independent projects. Different from scheduled classes or the rented studio space that Grounded offers, owner Ashley Pastore explained Open Studios are "more like being in a creative space with other people."

Since Open Studios are self-directed, participants come with their own ideas and projects. "Maybe you've already taken a class at Grounded, or maybe you already have prior knowledge, like how to use an etching press or how to do a monoprint," Pastore explained. "You come in and are able to use the heavy equipment that we have there that you wouldn't necessarily have in your house to complete that project."

Additionally, Pastore has begun hosting Open Papermaking at the same time as Open Studios for an additional fee. "The idea is that I would like to be able to get more people having access to and understanding what papermaking is," Pastore said. People who want to hone their papermaking skills are asked to send Pastore an email prior to Open Studios so all of the necessary materials such as recycled paper pulp and pigments are available.

The equipment available for use includes two etching presses, two letter presses, and a new screen printing system. People using the space also have the tools for monoprinting, easy cut and woodblock carving, and painting.

"It doesn't even have to be printmaking



Whether you want to practice or try out a new artistic skill, work on a project around other creative minds, or use large-scale equipment to achieve something you wouldn't be able to at home: consider attending a regular Tuesday Open Studio at Grounded Print and Paper Shop.

related," Pastore said. Some artists who come to Open Studios work on projects outside of printmaking and papermaking, including felting alpaca fur and quilting.

The space provides another opportunity in Erie to engage with other creative people. "It's nice to work and be creative when I know that there are other people around me essentially prioritizing that same thing," Pastore said.

— Alana Sabol
 Every Tuesday // \$10 entry fee, \$30 for open papermaking // Grounded Print Shop, 1902 Cherry St. // For more info: groundedprintshop.com



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EVENTS

Erie Restaurant Week's Biggest Year Yet

Support local restaurants all over the Erie area this January

BEGINNING FRIDAY, JAN. 19

With the holiday season behind us, the cooking burnout hits hard. Most folks don't want to even think about their kitchen — let alone cook — for the next month or two.

In answer to your post-holiday cooking woes, Erie Restaurant Week is returning for its fourth year and will run Jan. 19 through 28. The 10-day event helps support local businesses while showcasing big names alongside lesser-known area restaurants.

Created in 2021 by VisitErie, Erie County's official destination marketing organization, Erie Restaurant Week is designed to highlight and support the diverse restaurants in the Erie area that are critical parts of the region's tourism industry.

Many familiar names are returning to the event, but more than a dozen newcomers will join the ranks this year, including: 6 Pack House of Beer, Altered State Distillery, Bar Ronin, Bob's Steakhouse, Churchill's Bourbon & Brew, Cloud 9 Wine Bar & Restaurant, The Colony Pub & Grill, The Corner Bar and Grillz, Like My Thai, Lucero, Rosco's Sports Bar & Grill, and Underdog BBQ.

As in previous years, each restaurant participating will have a special menu and pricing designed specifically for the event, with many offering dine in, carry out, or pickup options to accommodate everyone's dining style.

New this year is the chance to win one of five \$100 Visa gift cards for participating in the event, simply by texting ERW24 to 833-922-1432 and following prompts to submit your receipt for entry (normal text message rates apply). VisitErie is also encouraging participants to share their plates on social media using #ErieRestaurantWeek.

"Erie Restaurant Week is now in its fourth year, and it's our largest yet," VisitErie President and CEO John Oliver said. "January usually sees a dip in restaurant activity, making Erie Restaurant Week a valuable initiative to uplift them. With more than 45 restaurants taking part [this year], people have an abundance of options to get out and show their support." — Ally Kutz



Help offset the service industry slump that inevitably happens during the gray months in Erie by supporting some of the establishments participating in Visit Erie's Restaurant Week.

Full list of participating restaurants (alphabetical):

- 6 Pack House of Beer (847 Pittsburgh Ave.)
- Altered State Distillery (1535 W. Eighth St.)
- Bar Ronin (948 W. Erie Plaza Dr.)
- Bay House Oyster Bar & Restaurant (6 Sassafras Pier)
- Bob's Steakhouse (1101 Peninsula Dr.)
- The Brewerie at Union Station (123 W. 14th St.)
- Bricks American Steakhouse (417 State St.)
- Bro Man's Sammiches, Birria & Burgers (Inside Gulf Gas Station at 8828 Peach St.)
- Churchill's Bourbon & Brew (8199 Perry Hwy.)
- Cloud 9 Wine Bar & Restaurant (25 E. 10th St.)
- The Colony Pub & Grille (2670 W. Eighth St.)
- The Cork 1794 (900 W. Erie Plaza Dr.)
- The Corner Bar & Grillz (32 E. Main St., Corry)
- Donatos Pizza (4829 Buffalo Rd., 1535 W. Eighth St. Suite A1, 861 E. 38th St.)
- Federal Hill Smokehouse (2609 Peach St.)
- Firebirds Wood Fired Grill (680 Millcreek Mall Blvd.)
- Flagship City Food Hall, including CheesErie, Din's Authentic Dominican Kitchen, Jo's Brooklyn Bagel Too, Noodlelove, North Row Philly, Perry's Pizza, The Straw Hat, Taste & See Fruit & Veggie Bar, and State Street Taco (22 N. Park Row)
- John Russell Brewing Company (7520 Peach St.)
- Julius (1607 State St.)
- Lavery Brewing (128 W. 12th St.)
- The Lawrence Park Dinor (4019 Main St.)
- Like My Thai (827 State St.)
- Lucero (940 W. Erie Plaza Dr.)
- Luminary Distilling (8270 Peach St.)
- Madeline's Dining & Events (8844 PA-18, Cranesville)
- Pineapple Eddie Southern Bistro (1402 W. 10th St.)
- The Plymouth Tavern (1109 State St.)
- Poverty Knob Farmhouse Ales (2055 Stone Quarry Rd., Waterford)
- The Que Abides Pit Stop (6990 W. Lake Rd., Fairview)
- Riverside Brewing Company (1 Fountain St., Cambridge Springs)
- Rosco's Sports Bar & Grill (4646 Buffalo Rd.)
- Samurai Kitchen + Sushi (2767 W. 12th St.)
- The Skunk & Goat Tavern (17 W. Main St., North East)
- Syd's Place (2992 W. Lake Rd.)
- Twisted Elk Brewery (10139 W. Lake Rd., Lake City)
- Underdog BBQ (2714 W. Eighth St.)
- U Pick 6 Harbor House (4454 Buffalo Rd.)
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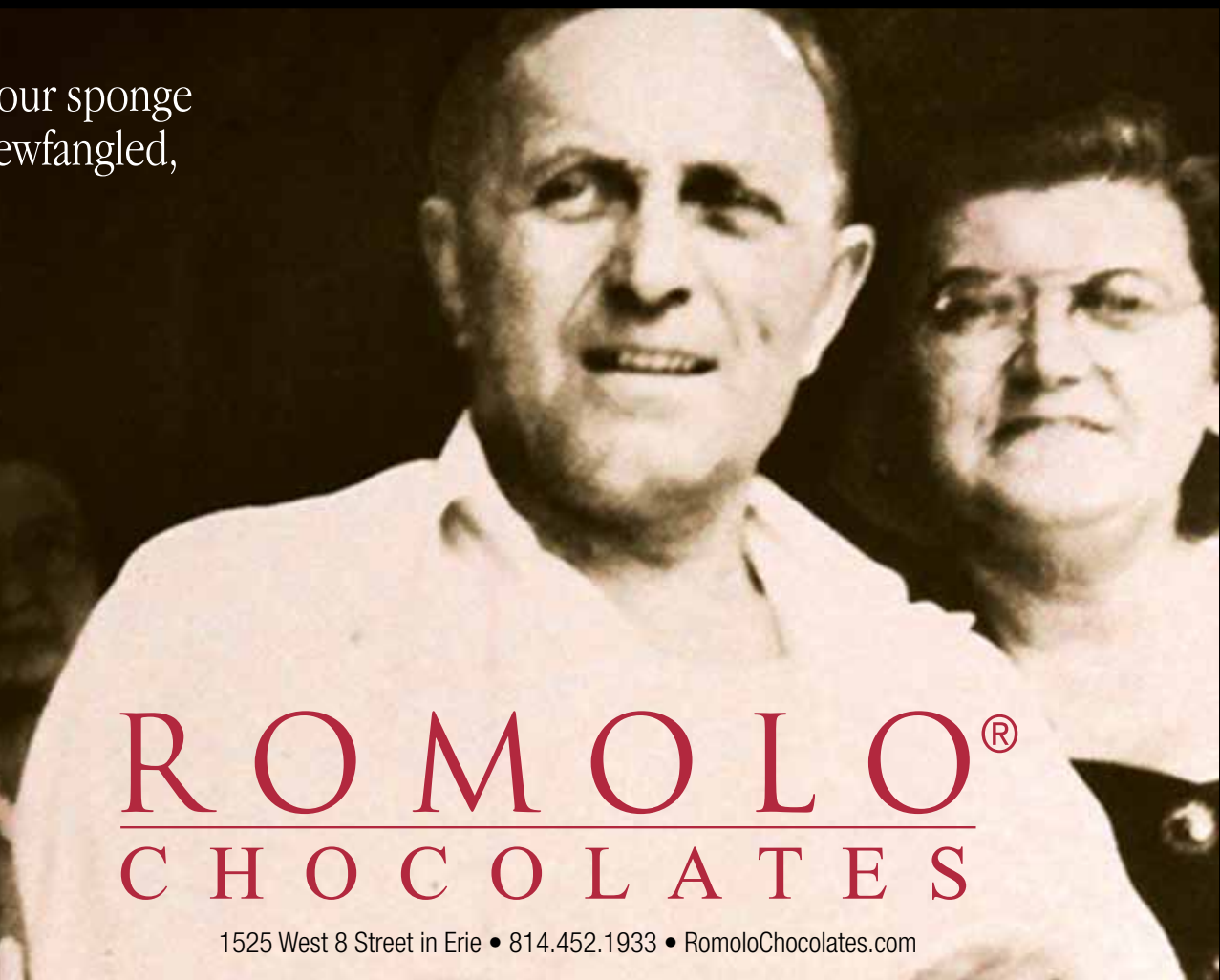
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EVENTS

Erie Philharmonic Honors Leonard Bernstein with Mahler's Third Symphony

Youth Chorale joins female members of Erie Phil Chorus for impressive production

SATURDAY, JAN. 20

Over 200 musicians will bring the monumental power of Gustav Mahler's Third Symphony to the Warner Theatre stage in the Erie Philharmonic's first major performance of 2024. Featuring renowned vocalist Lindsay Ammann alongside the Erie Philharmonic Youth Chorale and the women of the Erie Philharmonic Chorus under the direction of Sharon Downey and Thomas Brooks, both the symphony and concert will honor the legacy of composer Leonard Bernstein, whose performance of the piece was recently featured in the 2023 biopic *Maestro*.

"As we perform Mahler's grand Symphony No. 3, we not only celebrate Bernstein's musical genius as depicted in the film, but also the unifying power of music he championed. The performance is a bridge between past and present, encapsulating the vastness of human experience through a compelling fusion of instrument and voice," the Erie Philharmonic states. "It's a reflection on how Bernstein's vision and Mahler's compositions continue to resonate and inspire, drawing parallels with the cinematic tribute to a legend who reshaped the world of classical music."

Ammann previously performed Verdi's Requiem with the Erie Philharmonic in 2010. She is an alumna of the Resident Artist program at the Pittsburgh Opera and has performed with companies including the Metropolitan Opera, the Washington National Opera, the Canadian Opera Company, the Lyric Opera in Chicago, and the Opéra National de Lyon in Paris.

The Erie Philharmonic Youth Chorale, which features the youngest voices in Erie with choristers ranging in age from elementary through middle school, will be adding their choral talents to the (already packed) stage. Youth Chorale director Sharon Downey comments, "Learning there would be two symphonic programs with significant parts for a children's chorus this season was exciting but also a bit frightening. Were our young singers going to be ready for a symphonic program? And an epic Mahler symphony for their first experience? More musicians on stage than ever before?"

But Downey feels confident in their work, "We emphasize professionalism in all of our rehearsals and preparation, and this collaboration with *Maestro*



Join the Erie Philharmonic orchestra alongside the women of the Erie Philharmonic Chorus and the Youth Chorale as they mount the impressive Third Symphony of Gustav Mahler at the historic Warner Theatre.

Meyer, the orchestra, an alto soloist, and the women of the Philharmonic Chorus will demand yet another level of maturity and musicianship." She continues, "Singing Mahler Three will be a thrilling and memorable experience for our young singers that they will long remember."

Mahler and Bernstein are both considered highly influential in the world of classical music, helping to bring the genre into the modern era. Both Mahler and Bernstein brought the exploration of human work into their compositions, showcasing themes of love and nature while influencing generations of composers.

Mahler began composing his Third Symphony during the summers of 1895 and 1896 in between his busy schedule as a conductor in Hamburg, Vienna, and Berlin. Drawing inspiration from a collection of various German folk po-

ems and songs, he crafted a symphony that departed from the established four-movement structure to create a six-movement story. His viewpoint was that a symphony should not be defined by the structure but through the story and world it creates, drawing inspiration from nature and emotions to form a symphonic poem.

Leonard Bernstein in particular was influenced by Mahler, to whom he could relate as both a composer and conductor. Serving as the director of music for the New York Philharmonic, he began a series of recordings of Mahler's Symphonies with the orchestra known as the "Bernstein-Mahler Cycle", which would help revive the composer's musical and historical significance as portrayed in *Maestro*. — Thomas Taylor

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

Mercyhurst's Taylor Little Theatre Offers Up Chekhov's *The Seagull*

Play captures the purgatory of the creative

PREMIERING THURSDAY, JAN. 25

Opening night for Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* was a disaster; one of the lead actresses was so threatened by the antagonistic tenor of the crowd that she lost her voice, and Chekhov left the audience and sat behind the stage for the latter two acts, so convinced that he had produced "a collapse such as [he] had never dreamed of!"

Yet the play would go on to become a triumph, one of the most popular plays ever performed (and adapted for the screen) and considered one of his very best works.

So it is with great pleasure that the Mercyhurst Theater Program brings *The Seagull* to its Taylor Little Theatre stage, with a new translation by Jean-Claude van Itallie, under the direction of Dr. Brett D. Johnson (who is also the director of the theater program).

Set in the country estate of Pyotr Nikolayevich Sorin — artists, creatives, and others tied to the estate spend the summer months interacting, falling in love, hoping for the future, and learning disappointment. Dr. Johnson reflects, "Like the seagull, which belongs neither to land nor sea, the characters in Chekhov's play are trapped in a sort of purgatory; they're holding onto — and haunted by — the lives they didn't live, the choices they didn't make."

"The young writer, Treplyev," Johnson



The students of the Mercyhurst University Theater Program present Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* in their Taylor Little Theatre this January. The image of the seagull is a metaphor for the feeling the characters of the play evoke.

continues, "attempts to shake them into life in order to heal their broken hearts and consequently, his own."

The cast for this classic play includes Tori St. John-Gilbert, Braden Rosciszewski, Ben Vacca, Abby Craig, Eric Page, Nicole French, Ali Forsythe, John Carroll, Mason Reynolds, Michael Harper, and Maya Post, while the creative team includes scenic designer Tucker Topel, lighting designer Madeleine Steineck, production stage manager Bridget Gedeon, and assistant stage managers Kate Bentley and Maya Dildine. — Cara Suppa

Thursday, Jan. 25 through Saturday, Jan. 27 at 7:30 p.m. // Sunday, Jan. 28 at 2 p.m. // Taylor Little Theatre, 501 E. 38th St. // \$5-\$15 // Tickets and info: miac.mercyhurst.edu

Drag yourself into the New Year with *Tootsie* at the Erie Playhouse

Erie theater veteran directs the musical comedy as the 2024 playhouse opener

PREMIERING FRIDAY, JAN. 26

When a difficult actor finds himself unhirable and decides to disguise himself as a woman to land the part of a lifetime, hilarity ensues. The hit musical *Tootsie*, based on the Sydney Pollack Oscar-nominated film of the same name, will be the first Erie Playhouse show of 2024. Playhouse artistic director Richard Davis is directing.

Davis has been a part of the Erie theater scene for 45 years; 35 of those with the Playhouse. He has directed over 100 productions for the Erie Playhouse, Roadhouse, Director's Circle, and PACA, as well as at local high schools. He says what he loves about *Tootsie* is that it "is such a fun show but with great heart...I'm sure Erie audiences are going to love it."

During its Broadway run, *Tootsie* was nominated for 10 Tony awards, winning Best Book of a Musical. It also won four Drama Circle awards, including Best Musical. According to Davis "the show also features a dynamic score with music and lyrics by David Yazbek." Theater fans may be familiar with Yazbek's work on other Broadway musicals including *The Full Monty*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, and *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*.

The playhouse production will feature Jordan Wolfe as Michael Dorsey/Dorothy Michaels in the role made famous on the big screen by Dustin Hoffman. This will be



The hit musical based on the 1982 Oscar-nominated film will be taking the LECOM stage at the Erie Playhouse at the end of the month with a cast packed full of local talent. This show will provide the perfect opportunity to shake off the winter blues.

Wolfe's Erie Playhouse debut. Julie will be played by Natalya Myers who was recently in the Playhouse production of *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* in the role of Cynthia Weil. The cast also features Melina Walters as Sandy Lester, Ryan Dawley as Jeff Slater, Dan Bainbridge as Ron Carlisle, and newcomer Nathan Irwin as Max Van Horn, the character who is in romantic pursuit of Dorothy Michaels. Davis adds, "*Tootsie* is extremely clever and funny... and is going to be the perfect show to shake off the winter blues." — Edwina Capozziello

Fridays and Saturdays through Feb. 10 at 7:30 p.m. // Sundays Feb. 4 and 11 at 2 p.m. \$18.49-\$29.40 // For info and tickets: erieplayhouse.org

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EVENTS

PACA Brings *Weird Romance* Back to Erie

Director Robert Martin showcases his favorite Alan Menken work

PREMIERING FRIDAY, JAN. 26

Prepare to be enchanted by the compelling fusion of science fiction and timeless themes in *Weird Romance* at the Performing Artists Alliance Collective (PACA) in Erie. This extraordinary production, composed by the legendary Alan Menken (musical genius behind iconic works like *The Little Shop of Horrors*, *Aladdin*, and *Beauty and the Beast*) promises an unforgettable theatrical experience.

Under the expert direction of Robert Martin, also known for his direction of *The Fantasticks* at PACA, as well as his extensive repertoire of dozens of theatrical productions, the stage comes alive with innovation and artistry.

The narrative unfolds in two acts, each weaving a captivating tale that challenges conventional boundaries. The first act, "The Girl Who Was Plugged In," immerses the audience in a world where a scientist unveils the ability to transfer a living soul into a flawless, manufactured body for commercial purposes. As love blossoms between his son and this artificial creation, ethical dilemmas arise, testing the boundaries of humanity and love. Act Two, "Her Pilgrim Soul," tells the story of a scientist entangled

in a mysterious relationship with a holographic entity. As their connection deepens, enigmatic questions emerge.

Featuring a stellar cast composed of local theater favorites and fresh talents, including Brendan Daugherty, Patrick Vahey, Brandon Vogt, Jesse Cammarata, Jordan Gilmore, Teal Weatherley, Camellia Tatar, Molly Parks, and Jessie Thorpe, this production promises performances that are sure to captivate.

"It's not Alan Menken's most known work, but that's exactly why I think it deserves to be seen," says Martin. "I became obsessed with these two sci-fi stories set to incredible music. I loved the clever way the two acts were constructed — with nine actors playing multiple roles in each of the acts. Producing it in its entirety at PACA felt like an opportunity I couldn't pass up."

Experience emotion and intrigue in *Weird Romance* at PACA — an extraordinary theatrical journey that transcends the ordinary and invites audiences into a world of imagination and reflection. — Aaron Mook

Fridays and Saturdays, 7:30 p.m.; concluding matinee performance Sunday, Feb. 11 at 2 p.m. // 1505 State St. // \$20 // paca1505.org



The cast of *Weird Romance*, playing this month at PACA, presents two, one-act sci-fi musicals. They are: [Top, left to right] Jesse Cammarata, Patrick Vahey, Jordan Gilmore, Molly Parks, Brendan Daugherty, Camellia Tatar and [Bottom, left to right] Teal Weatherley and Jessie Thorpe.

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Small Town Rollers January 12
Grateful Trio January 21
Surprise Guise February 2
Kidd Kyle & The Big Deal February 9
Dave & Pappy from the CAUSE March 3
Jeremy & Skylar March 22
Cosmic Rhythm March 29

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EVENTS

Erie Songwriter Presents Inspired Songs and Stories

Tyler Smilo encourages audience to *Make Something Beautiful*

SATURDAY, JAN. 27

Local singer/songwriter Tyler Smilo (of Erie's 2023 40 Under 40 class) is bringing back his *Songs and Stories* performance to City Gallery. Smilo plans to perform his songs while simultaneously telling the stories of his life that inspired his work. This is the second year that Smilo has done this, with last year's *Songs and Stories* focusing on his *Tale of Addiction and Recovery*. This year's performance is entitled *Make Something Beautiful*. "I hope the audience gets to feel something honest," Smilo expresses. "Find some perspective on what it's like being an addict and perhaps some hope for a loved one, or themselves, dealing with something similar. I want to inspire people to be creative in their own life. Life can be very demanding and we can miss so much so easily."

Smilo is very open about his struggles with addiction and the path on which it's taken him, spending three years of his adult life in rehab centers. During these stints, he brought his guitar and would write and perform his songs for those also in recovery. Smilo says, "That setting was much different than the corner of a bar room or even a stage at a venue. The other residents knew exactly what I was saying and why. My music had a home."

While most locals know him from his band Smilo and the Ghost, some may not know much about the man who writes the songs they enjoy. Smilo hopes that



Local singer songwriter Tyler Smilo will present his second iteration of his *Songs and Stories* performance at City Gallery. This act is entitled *Make Something Beautiful* and tackles themes of addiction and creativity.

these shows will be insightful to those in attendance: "I don't believe it takes an addict to understand the thoughts and feelings behind the show. Everyone can relate to the human condition. Also addiction is such a widespread issue it would be hard to find someone who hasn't been affected in one way or another."

This show is more intimate than he is used to, leaving Smilo alone on stage with just a guitar and microphone. This unique look into the songwriting process is a one-night-only event, so don't miss it. — Larry Wheaton

7 p.m. // City Gallery, 1503 State St. // \$20 // For tickets and info: smiloandtheghost.com/tour



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Celebrating 50 Years in 2024!



All An Act Adapts *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

The Agatha Christie Poirot novel finds new life (from death) on stage

PREMIERING FRIDAY, FEB. 2

For Erie's All An Act Theatre, how to kick off a new year's season is no mystery. Agatha Christie does it.

As the local theater company moves into its 20th year of work, a Christie play has helped usher in a new calendar year 13 times. For its 14th round, David W. Mitchell decided to adapt one of her novels himself, one centering around blackmail and death.

Debuting in 1926, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* fell into the public domain in 2022, inviting interpretations at no cost. While Mitchell, the theater's artistic director has authored plays before, this is the first time he's attempted to adapt a book to the stage. "It's a whole new animal," he explained. "There's been some rearranging of events, some combinations of characters — because I don't see the need for three inspectors," he joked, noting that "it would be a cast of 57 if you got every character in the book." An editing of excessive dialog, while still leaving in relevant clues to the mystery also played a part in the adaptation.

And of course, that mystery is at the heart of every Agatha Christie work. Her fourth novel to feature the iconic detective Hercule Poirot as the protagonist coming out of retirement, *Roger Ackroyd* hasn't found a quintessential film adaptation aside from the David Suchet series and the "lost" 1931 film *Alibi*.

In addition to Poirot (played by Stephen Salchli), characters include Dr. James Sheppard (Dave DiCola), his



sister Caroline (Char Newport), Miss Russell (Dorothy Kaliszewski-Sexhauer), Rob Carney as the titular Ackroyd, Cecil Ackroyd (Peggy Brace), Flora Ackroyd (Ciara Adams), Geoffrey Raymond (Soren Levine), Parker the butler (Steve Ropski), Major Blunt (Wayne Gardner), Inspector Davis (Michael Nasca), Ursula Bourne (Violet Vance), and three different roles portrayed by Josh Herrera.

With a spectacular set featuring a revolving stage, and a plot that will keep you guessing until the very end, you'll find out why this work is known as one of the single most important works of the genre. — Nick Warren

Feb. 2 through 24 // Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 3 p.m. // All An Act Theatre, 652 W. 17th St. // \$18, seniors (55+) and students \$15, children (6 to 11) \$5 // for tickets and more information, go to allanact.net

A Modern Day Warrior

The Iron Claw is almost too tragic to handle



Professional wrestling is a virtual treasure trove of interesting stories. The business naturally leads to fascinating personalities and stories so over-the-top they strain credibility. But while we all know of the literally larger-than-life tales of Hulk Hogan and Andre the Giant, what about the lesser known stars? The working class people who put their bodies through the gauntlet, all for the cheers of a small but dedicated crowd of local fans? This is exactly what we get with *The Iron Claw*, the story of a wrestling family that couldn't be more tragic if it was taken from some television melodrama. But it all really happened and it is heartbreaking.

This is the story of Kevin Von Erich (Zac Efron) who, along with his brothers, works tirelessly trying to make a name for himself and his regional Texas wrestling promotion while under the domineering eye of his father (Holt McCallany). As the Von Erich brothers' hard work begins to pay off in the form of title



shots and adoring crowds, their day-to-day lives are mired by injuries, addiction, and death.

The first act of the film has a laidback "hangout" feel similar to a Richard Linklater film. This works to familiarize us with the brothers before the tragedies strike. When they do, it almost becomes too much to bear. Writer/director Sean Durkin has an unenviable job of telling possibly the saddest story in an industry riddled with sad stories. They all hit so fast that it becomes hard

to process, but it builds up beautifully to the film's devastating final scene. Wrestling fans will find much to appreciate in this seldom told story, but non-fans may find it too sad to handle. — Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Sean Durkin // Starring Zac Efron, Jeremy Allen White, Holt McCallany, Harris Dickinson, Maura Tierney, Stanley Simons, Lily James, Cazzezy Louis Careghino, Kevin Anton, Maxwell Friedman, Brady Pierce, and Aaron Dean Eisenberg // A24 // 132 minutes // Rated R

Her Fair Lady

Poor Things is an interesting new direction for Yorgos Lanthimos



Yorgos Lanthimos has made a name for himself with his combination of abstract unconventional visuals and plotting with biting social commentary. That said, his stories, for as good as they can be, tend to lack a certain warmth and humanity. But now the veteran of the Greek Weird Wave gives us *Poor Things*, which offers an almost whimsical new direction for his films. This delightfully absurd mixture of *Frankenstein* and *Pygmalion* contains all of Lanthimos' style with fish-eyed lenses and blocking with excessive headspace, but also a newfound sense of humanity rather than his signature cynicism.

Set in a fantasy version of late 19th-century Europe, the brilliant but unorthodox surgeon Godwin Baxter (Willem Dafoe) brings another doctor (Ramy Youssef) to his home to study the day-to-day progress of Bella (Emma Stone), a mysterious young woman with the mind of an infant. Bella is to be confined in Baxter's home and observed, but their experiment hits a snag when she insists on running off with a lawyer (Mark Ruffalo) on an adven-



ture to explore the world and humanity.

The film has incredible performances all around, but this is obviously Emma Stone's show. With her combination of wide-eyed bemusement and razor sharp wit, she is perfectly cast as the ultimate fish out of water discovering social etiquette, gender roles, sexual politics, and the often contradictory rules for being human — particularly a woman — all at once. Lanthimos is having his usual sardonic fun at the expense of human

society, but Stone's utterly human performance keeps this fantastical story grounded and just believable enough to be relatable. — Forest Taylor

Directed by Yorgos Lanthimos // Written by Tony McNamara // Based on the novel by Alasdair Gray // Starring Emma Stone, Mark Ruffalo, Willem Dafoe, Ramy Youssef, Margaret Qualley, Suzy Bemba, Kathryn Hunter, Vicki Pepperdine, Hanna Schygulla, Jerrod Carmichael, and Christopher Abbott // 141 minutes // Searchlight Pictures // Rated R

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FRIDGE COMICS

By Anthony @antsart house



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Fish that Talk

by Steve Bunker
LIVE! Steamboat Trutter 2024!

Mickey's Copyright Adventure: Early Disney Creation Will Soon Be Public Property

The version of the iconic character from "Steamboat Willie" will enter the public domain in 2024. But those trying to take advantage could end up in a legal mousetrap.



Cease and Desist

I am writing on behalf of **KISS**, the world-renowned rock band known for its unique and iconic brand, including the distinctive makeup and personas of its members. It has come to our attention that you have created and distributed artwork depicting one of the **KISS** characters, specifically Gene Simmons and his role as **The Demon**, without obtaining prior authorization from **KISS** or its legal representatives.

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"I'M GONNA NEED THAT BOX."

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Kurt Vile

Back to Moon Beach
Verve 2023



Say you're not a fan of John Prine, Townes Van Zandt, or even Joni Mitchell — I'll call you a liar or a cynic. On



this beefy EP, Pennsylvania native Kurt Vile's influences are worn unapologetically on his lushly embroidered sleeve. At its most austere, we hear heartsick echoes of Neil Young at the piano while his most stark moments stretch like shadows to fill every corner of a room like Springsteen on *Nebraska*.

Vile delivers self-consciously simple progressions and transitions which float his easy drawl like honeysuckle and tobacco on the breeze. His lyrics tackle the mysteries of joy, pain, and confusion with a single vorpal blade. His tempos allow the listener to linger, savoring each aspect. The title track ebbs from Silver Jews' "Trains" and flows toward Robert Plant's "Big Log." "Tom Petty's Gone" punches humbly through Vile's best fan boy banner. Ending single "Cool Water" celebrates the metaphoric romanticism of early country western favorites. These and other original compositions are padded with juicy covers from Dylan and Wilco. This release is a natural addition for any Vile collector and a great introduction for those new to his game. — Melissa Sullivan Shimek

HEALTH

RAT WARS
Loma Vista Recordings



After mixing it up with their peers on the collaborative double album *DISCO4*, HEALTH returns in its most mechanical form on *RAT WARS*. On this, their fifth proper studio album, HEALTH tools with dance and ethereal motifs to give their industrial sound a more danceable edge — creating a record that is as melodic as it is emotionally crushing.



The album splits into two sides as tracks act as the centerpiece of each. Side A's focal point is "Hateful (of all else)" while the subsequent side is defined by "Ashamed (of being born)." "Hateful" is the album at its most furious, as the backing mixture of synths and drums pummel the audience. On the chorus, the track picks up speed until dropping out to focus on vocalist Jake Duzsik chanting the song title.

"Ashamed" is the complete opposite of its predecessor. While equally angry, the band turns the hatred inward. With more sparse instrumentation, HEALTH formulates the perfect soundtrack for running away from oneself.

Described as a "Downward Spiral" in the album's release notes (in a nod to Nine Inch Nails), HEALTH's *RAT WARS* is exactly that. Over 41 minutes, HEALTH crafts a record that portrays contemporary life in all its hysterical glory. — Nathaniel Clark

Bonnie Prince Billy

Keeping Secrets Will Destroy You
Drag City



Will Oldham (Bonnie Prince Billy) as



Palace back in mid-90s was a pensive, innocent experience. So earnest, leaving one feeling suspect. Most don't enjoy feeling exposed then being made a fool. Yet Oldham proves himself a friend not foe, by transcending his peers over the decades. With this release, we find Oldham as Bonnie Prince Billy again. *Keeping Secrets* lays feelings bare, exposes thoughts we don't discuss, even with closest friends. These songs could have been learned from a grandmother over a washtub or overheard from an open tavern window hundreds of years ago. His delivery benefits from his experience as an actor — each track manifests its own personality. These songs, his lineage, will one day be carved into the American songbook. Imagine "Crazy Blue Bells" being recorded by Alan Lomax on a front porch at twilight. "Willow, Pine & Oak" functions as a mnemonic device for daily interactions. "Queens of Sorrow" should be a hymn taught to school children. Songs like "Like It or Not" and "Behold! Be held!" settle into the other side of our midlife crises with an acceptance and a certain calm in their knowing. Will Oldham has aged well. — Melissa Sullivan Shimek

SPRINTS

Letter to Self
City Slang



This remarkable debut record feels like a band fully formed. Heavy, intelligent, and arresting, *SPRINTS' Letter*



to Self is the first great album of 2024. Making no mysteries about some of their influences, the band credits Savages as a key figure, citing other bands like IDLES, Bauhaus, and LCD Soundsystem. Do you know what all of that means? That means RIFFS. Glorious, powerful, metallic riffs accompanied by some of the finest post-rock bass playing I can remember. This Irish quartet, led by singer and guitarist Karla Chubb, have thankfully arrived in album form, and will find themselves touring stateside this spring (though sadly not close enough in this reviewer's opinion). As much as been made about the band's ferocious live shows, *Letter to Self* paints a deep portrait of immediacy, an unflinchingly vulnerable battle cry from Chubb that often comes in shout-along form. It doesn't have the characteristically lachrymose darkness of most post-punk, and even has a few songs in major keys, like "Literary Mind" and its follow-up "A Wreck (A Mess)." I hope this band sticks around for some time, because this explosive balance of rock, punk, and indie doesn't come along very often. — Nick Warren

TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK

Happy New Year! This cartoon is actually a redone verison of the very first Tommy in Toon from SEVEN YEARS AGO! Where does the time go! Anyway, I'm here to say there are some new places to follow the comic! We're gonna work on some more online stuff this year, and we hope to see you there! Thank you for sticking with us all this time, and thank you Erie Reader for always giving us a home! Cheers!

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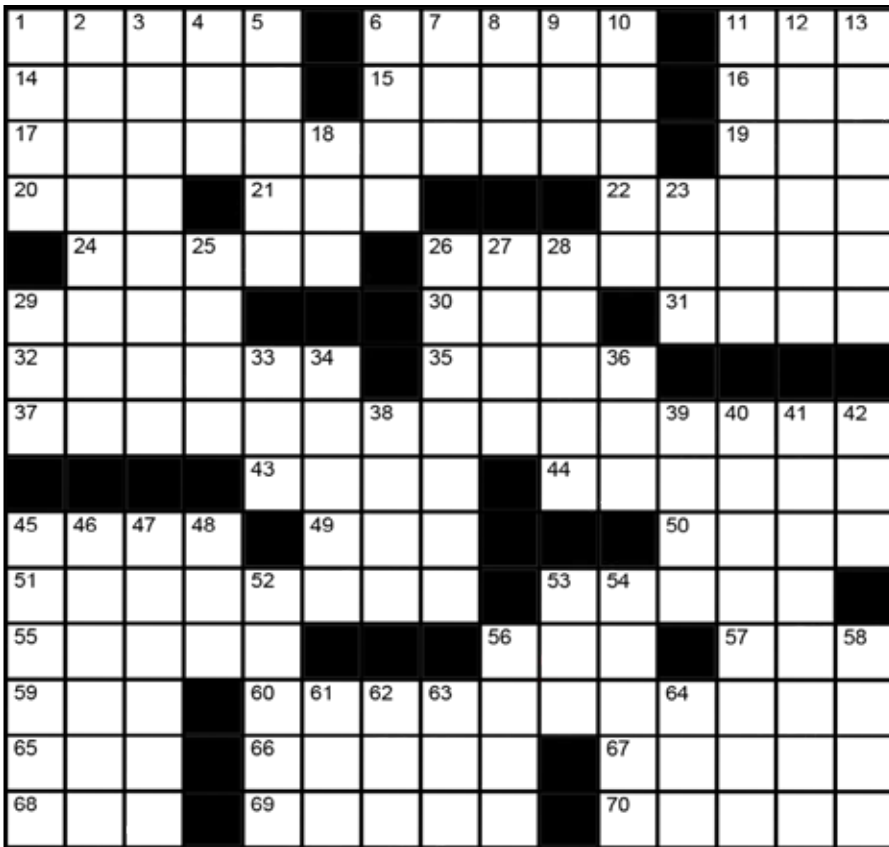
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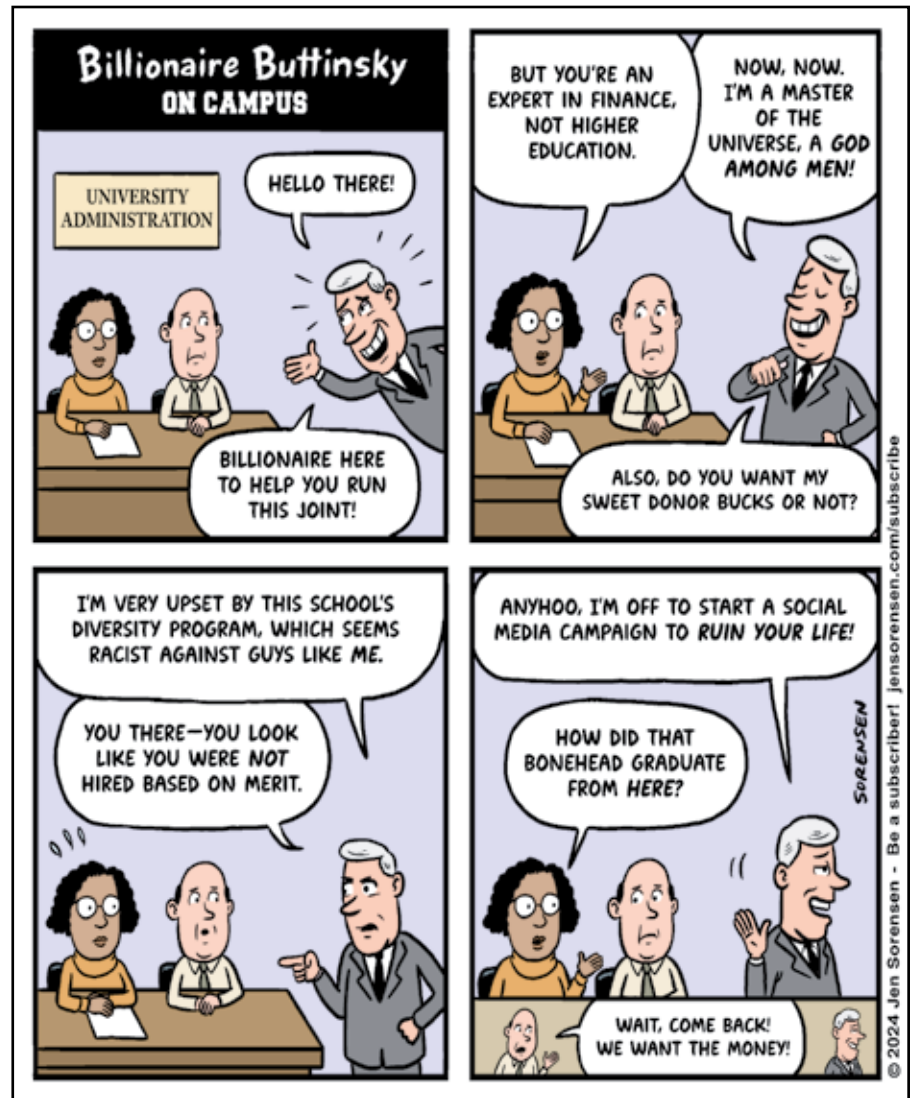
1. "When it comes to ..."
6. Conclude by
11. Where Wizards play with Magic, in brief
14. John ____, husband of Pocahontas
15. Affect emotionally
16. Test by a neurologist, for short
17. "Deep!"
19. Zoomer's parent, maybe
20. Still
21. Geological span
22. ____ Dame
24. Exams for future attys.
26. "Check out this trick I can do!"
29. Predicament
30. Spotify or TikTok
31. Follower of open or pigeon
32. It goes from about 540 to 1700
35. One of eight vegetables in V8
37. Tofu, e.g. (or what can be found at the ends of 17-, 26-, 51- and 60-Across)
43. Laugh hard
44. Honey brand since 1921
45. Jul. 4 cookouts
49. The "S" of RSVP
50. Social position
51. Perfectly suited partner
53. Lena featured on

- the U.S. Postal Service's Black Heritage postage stamp series
55. "Schitt's Creek" matriarch
56. Sloth, for one
57. "Sound of da Police" rapper ____-One
59. Engine starter: Abbr.
60. Some members of a presidential candidate's campaign staff
65. ____ for tat
66. City home to the 1,000-year-old Al-Azhar University
67. "Under the Redwoods" author Bret
68. "Isn't ____ bit like you and me?" (Beatles lyric)
69. Beginning
70. Mend, as a torn seam

Down

1. Like many student films
2. "I swear ..."
3. Pop with no fizz
4. O'er and o'er
5. Go from 60 to 0, say
6. School on the Thames
7. ____ de plume
8. Expected
9. Play a role
10. "____ you!"
11. Neighboring
12. "Brewski! Now!"
13. Shook on it
18. "Help!"
23. Cheerios grain
25. Bickering

26. Patti in the Grammy Hall of Fame
27. Abbr. on old phones
28. Warms up the crowd
29. Singer Cooke
33. Foot rub reaction
34. Literature Nobelist Mario Vargas ____
36. Delta ____ Chi, house in "Animal House"
38. Nincompoop
39. Alternative to a prov.
40. Certain financial advisers, informally
41. More than look up to
42. "A mouse!!"
45. Lifestyle expert with a Bed Bath & Beyond line
46. Get down on the dance floor
47. "Abbott Elementary" creator/star ____ Brunson
48. 35mm camera type, in brief
52. "Uh-oh. Better get ____" (auto repair slogan)
53. Hyphenated beverage brand
54. Daylight saving time adjustment: Abbr.
56. Annoying little twerp
58. Eurasian duck
61. Levy of "Schitt's Creek"
62. "____ for Vengeance" (Grafton novel)
63. Verb that sounds like its second letter
64. ____ kwon do



Answers to last puzzle





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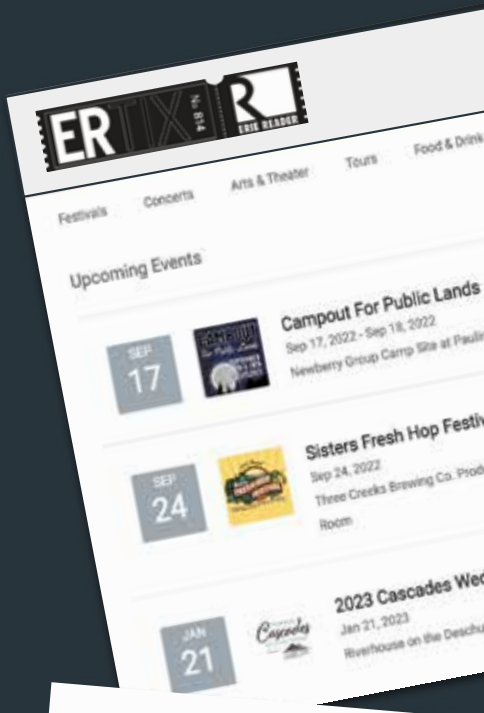
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