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ERIE'S 40 UNDER 40



40 YOUNG INNOVATORS, ENTREPRENEURS,
AND LEADERS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ERIE



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Happy retirement to David Levinson Wilk! This stumper is brought to you by Matt Jones (Jonesin' Crosswords)

From the Editors

Myriad measures of American success

The day after this issue, which is our biggest of the year (featuring our 12th annual 40 Under 40 class) is the Fourth of July, Independence Day. The day we celebrate America and our freedom — our patriotism on full display.

However, if you're like the increasing number of Americans discussed in Jeff Bloodworth's op-ed this month, someone who watched the recent presidential debate/debacle, or find yourself reeling from a spate of recent Supreme Court decisions, you may be feeling a little less than proud of our country these days — making Fourth of July celebrations feel a little icky, a little forced.

This issue also marks two years since another op-ed was published — one which resulted in our state senator suing this publication along with one of its contributing editors (you may have also read a recent Erie Times News article about Senator Laughlin purloining hundreds of copies of that print edition from various distribution locations throughout Erie County). And while that costly lawsuit continues to drag on and our First Amendment rights continue to be chipped away at, our collective faith in elected officials to do the right thing by the American people also continues to erode.

When we feel faithless in our government to make meaningful change — we have to do it ourselves. Bit by bit, person by person.

Enter Erie's 40 Under 40 class of 2024.

To quote one of our inductees this year — Anna Lindvay said, "You don't need to be an elected official or have a bunch of money in order to make an impact."

When we feel faithless in our government to make meaningful change — we have to do it ourselves. Bit by bit, person by person. And when 40 people do it at the same time? That's how we can be proud of where we're from — pride in our people working for the success of their community, putting in the effort, fighting the good fight, and, as cheesy as it sounds, making a real, measurable difference.

As evidenced by our class this year, definitions of success can vary wildly. Success can come in traditional ways — we have high-ranking lawyers, CEOs, Ph.D. recipients, successful, forward-thinking entrepreneurs, and those highly decorated with awards and accolades. But we also have plenty of folks featured whose measure of success is less obvious — those providing comfort, working to make a neighborhood more welcoming, raising money for an oft-overlooked cause, or inspiring change through art. All of the accomplishments of the 40 people featured herein contribute to making our city more vibrant, more fair, and more welcoming — and that is something to celebrate.

So this weekend, while we're watching the fireworks and waving our flags, think of the young people within these pages, working so hard to make our city (and by proxy, our country) better for everyone. And let them inspire you (at any age) to do the same, as we work together towards making Erie a place in which we can truly be proud.

Reclaiming Patriotism in the Trump Era from Performative to Restorative

“What, to Momma, is the Fourth of July?”

By: Jeff Bloodworth

My mother, Momma, is full of surprises. A decade back, the lifelong Republican and Southern Baptist endorsed same-sex marriage. In 2008, the Mississippi-born Erie transplant pronounced Barack Obama “a good family man” who earned her vote. Last week, the octogenarian took aim at Lee Greenwood’s patriotic anthem “God Bless the U.S.A.”

At issue was the refrain, “I’m proud to be an American/where at least I know I’m free.” Momma fumed, “That song is not true. The Indians and Blacks were not free!” Momma, of course, is right, but Southern Baptists adore that song. For \$59.99, one can buy a Greenwood/Trump “God Bless the USA Bible.” Jesus might not approve, but Southern Baptists, no doubt, are queuing up to buy it.

Momma’s apostasy, however surprising, is mainstream. Trumpism and our racial reckoning have soured many on patriotism. A generation ago, 70 percent of Americans pronounced themselves, in Greenwood’s verbiage, “proud to be an American.” Today, that number has cratered to a record-low 39 percent. Democrats and Zoomers lead this phenomenon. “Woke” may be a tired term, but it aptly describes the “Great Awakening,” in which white, college-educated liberals came to see that race and assorted bigotries are woven into the American tapestry. Due to this, many Americans, like Momma, struggle to jibe old patriotic rhetoric with new understandings.

Marcus Atkinson surely understands why. As a boy, Atkinson’s great-grandfather recounted the horror of cutting his dead brother’s lynched body from a rope. In the face of such history, the Erie native and business consulting guru explained, “I am very conflicted as it concerns patriotism. My frustration with America is that it has always said one thing and done

KEITH J SHANK



The sense of pride Americans have in our country is plummeting, tarnished by generations of racial inequalities. Young voters are the least patriotic among us, feeling powerless while constantly awash in bad news. The key in “reclaiming our flag” from the performative patriotism of conservatives may mean loving our country enough to try to change it for the better.

another.” But he proudly points to the record of Black military service. He rightly boasts, “The highest form of patriotism is to serve when your own country won’t defend your rights.” Honoring this, he refuses to cede patriotism to Lee Greenwood and, “The zealots and the radicals [who] believe they have a proprietary right on the subject of patriotism.”

Young voters are the least patriotic demographic. So, I asked an Erie Zoomer to explain. Tricia, who withheld her last name, was not surprised by patriotism’s demise. The 22-year-old blames the social pressure to incessantly consume and post “bad” news on social media. She told me, “If you aren’t posting about depressing world issues then you feel like a bad per-

son.” “The negativity,” in her words, may be “exhausting,” but it earns social approval — even as it sours us on the world. Derek Thompson supports Tricia’s observations. *The Atlantic* staff writer faults social media’s firehose of dismal news for plunging Americans into a “perma-gloom” of dejection. This, to him, explains why 85 percent of Americans are personally satisfied with their lives, but only 17 percent approve of the nation’s direction.

And surveys reveal that it is progressives, more than conservatives, who are gripped by this phenomenon. Disillusioned that our national project falls short of the Founders’ egalitarian vision, they, like my Momma, despair. An understandable reaction, the cruel



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irony is that American reform movements have always been founded upon patriotic calls to redeem the Founders' dream. Richard Rorty, a celebrated leftist philosopher aptly wrote, "National pride is to countries what self-respect is to individuals, a necessary condition for self-improvement." Rorty is right. Lee Greenwood's song is jingoism set to music. But progressives succeed when they find their movements in deeper patriotic sentiments.

Don't believe me? Barack Obama was an utter political unknown before his 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote address. That speech, which was soaked and saturated in patriotic themes, rocketed him to political stardom. FDR, MLK, the abolitionists, and suffragettes all pointed to the Founders as the inspiration for their reforms. For all our faults, America is the world's first-ever mass democracy. Europe is free of Nazi oppression due to us. We invented jazz, basketball, the polio vaccine, and Hungry, Hungry Hippos. Liberals, it ain't hard, look to the past for what worked: wash, rinse, and repeat.

Progressive patriotism is qualitatively distinct from what Tricia calls the "performative patriotism" of those "who put the flag on everything." This, to her, makes patriotism, almost by definition, into a "conservative" impulse. Kristy Gnibus, vice-chair of the Erie County Democratic Party, thinks "progressives need to take back the flag." But she understands that Zoomers struggle to describe patriotism. When asked to define it, Gnibus' 19-year-old daughter said, "I don't know, just vote." Gnibus has a more precise meaning. She explains, "Loving your country means accepting

your responsibility to change it."

John Halpin has a highfalutin term for Gnibus' impulse. He dubs it "national greatness liberalism." The senior fellow at the Center for American Progress told me, "National greatness liberalism seeks to carry out this patriotic project by upholding FDR's famous Four Freedoms for everyone: freedom of speech and worship; freedom from want and fear. In America, people are free to say and believe whatever they want and should have the economic means and personal safety to carry out their lives as they see fit."

Gnibus and Halpin's ideal is easy to achieve on paper. But we live in an age of profound cynicism. A scant 16 percent of Americans "trust" the government to "do the right thing always/most of the time." At the high tide of American liberalism, in 1965, it was 77 percent. Vietnam, Watergate, and social turmoil obliterated that trust. Ronald Reagan was no liberal hero, but during his presidency, he boosted levels of national pride. A 1983 poll showed 50 percent of Americans considered themselves "very patriotic." Alongside that patriotic boost came a 20-point rise in those who believed they "could trust the government to do what is right."

More than anything, patriotism is an expression of national self-confidence. But Americans no longer believe in one another. In 1948, when liberalism was the majority creed, the words Americans most commonly used to describe their fellow countrymen and women were "confident" and "generous." Today, the most common descriptors we apply to one another are "selfish," "spoiled," and "gullible." Grand liberal projects cannot

flower in this toxic hothouse. Donald Trump has sent us all into a downward spiral of seething resentment. That's his secret sauce. He goads liberals into hating him and, by extension, one another. Here's the antidote: refuse the bait.

Jim Wertz gets it. He thinks patriotism is an "action verb." The Democratic nominee for the Pennsylvania state senate told me, "As we try to right the wrongs of the past and present, we do so under the banner of the flag. It is unifying." He and my Momma point the way to a proper patriotic balance between the poles of Eeyore and Lee Greenwood.

Momma came of age in Jim Crow Mississippi. As a kid, segregation was a fact-of-life. At home, it was unspoken that segregation and racism were wrong. But she admits that she was blinded to the cruel and vicious realities of America's original sin. Today, Momma laments that. Her revulsion to what once was a favorite song is an expression of her own Great Awakening. But she told me, "We need to be patriotic, even though there are things we don't like. If you only look at the negative qualities, you don't see the good. We should try to find the good things. The good things keep you going."

America's dynamism and boorishness are our national yin and yang. These opposing impulses are inseparable. Be like Momma; defeat the yang, Trump, by relying upon the yin, patriotism.

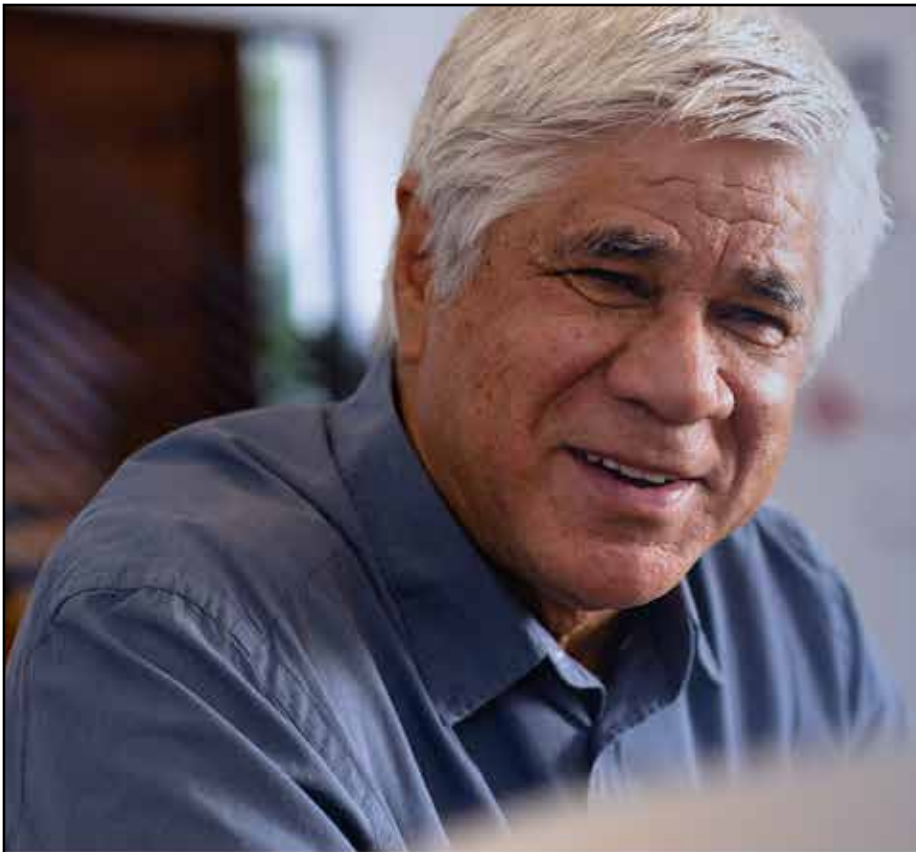
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The Tangled Web We've Woven

Grappling with smartphones, childhood, and their bitter convergence

By: Jonathan Burdick

In 1993, the World Wide Web as we know it was born when its source code was released into the public domain. For a few years, software consultant Tim Berners-Lee and others had been developing a way for computers connected to the internet to pass information back and forth to one another freely and with ease. The idea to release the source code royalty-free rather than commercialize it was perhaps surprising, but also important to Berners-Lee. His guiding principle was that the web should connect everyone to freely share knowledge. Additionally, for his concept to work, there needed to be a *single* united web.

"If I'd gone down that route [of charging], then there would have been lots of other people setting up different ones, incompatible ones," he explained in a 2016 interview. "The web would have fractured into a whole lot of small ones. Small webs don't work."

"He thought that if the whole world was building the Web together, no one company could take control of it," further explained Mark Fischetti, senior editor at *Scientific American* and co-author of *Weaving the Web: The Original Design and Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web* with Berners-Lee. Keeping it free also kept corporations and universities from creating their own networks to compete with the World Wide Web.

"This is very important," Berners-Lee told *Network World* in 1995, "and the continued growth of the Web depends on a continual spirit of openness to work together."

Having a singular World Wide Web is also what makes it so powerful. As *TIME* magazine pointed out, its creation brought "order and clarity to the chaos that was cyberspace ... [as] the Web and the Internet grew as one." Naturally though, for others, the competitive potential to make a lot of money was also a driving force in its expansion. This was demonstrated early on by the browser wars (remember Internet Explorer versus Netscape?) and the fight for users among online service providers (how about those direct mail free trial disks from AOL?)

By 1995, according to Pew Research Center polls, only about 14 percent of U.S. adults had internet access while 42 percent of the population said they had never even heard of it. Still, it was growing exponentially and was already transforming the world.

"The concept is so mind-boggling, the possibilities so vast, that contemplating it gives me a headache," wrote Dave Richards in the *Erie Times-News* at the time. "Via Internet, you can access — virtually instantly — the databases of millions of computers worldwide."

Almost immediately, too, there were fears that all of this could all be downright *addicting*. Dr. Kimberly S. Young, a psychology professor at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, was a pioneer in this field. She took interest in it in 1994 when a friend told her that her marriage was on the verge of collapse over



In May, the Millcreek School District voted to eliminate all student use of cell phones between the bells — a move that some are lauding as necessary to increase focus and limit distractions in the classroom. Others, however, feel that cell phones are simply a part of life, and that banning them is reactionary and difficult to enforce.

her husband's obsession with it. Young conducted a study involving 400 internet users who averaged over five hours online per day. She published her findings in peer-reviewed journals. She began giving interviews. There was plenty of pushback too. Some felt such an addiction wasn't possible, at least not in the traditional use of the word. Other skeptics called it "Orwellian hysteria." Confident that her findings were valid though, she soon founded the Center for Internet Addiction.

"It's not like 10 hours online is okay and 11 are bad," she told *Cincinnati Magazine*. "It's the behavior. The loss of control, the building dependence. It's when people start describing their use as 'I crave it' and 'I am depressed without it' that signals a problem."

In her bestselling 1998 book *Caught in the Net*, Young profiled a young professional named Robin who was constantly staying up late into the night talking with people in America Online chat rooms. Chat rooms, the "social media" of the early internet, were pretty astonishing to those who'd previously only known snail mail and expensive long distance phone calls. What started as a "pleasant diversion" for Robin soon led to obsession and exhaustion. She couldn't stop. She had trouble waking up for work and she lost the "bursts of creativity that once flowed easily."

In 1997, *Computerworld* asked Young why such addictions happen. "Fantasy games and chat rooms are exciting. Beats real life," she stated matter-of-factly. Like many addictions, Young continued, it was pleasure-seeking behavior and an escape mechanism. To those not addicted, it likely seemed baffling, but it's

real, she explained, although not exactly like drug and alcohol addiction. It's more comparable to pathological gambling or other impulse control disorders.

Robin, like others profiled in the book, didn't *mean* to spend so much time online. Young described this as entering a "terminal time warp," where what seems like 15 minutes online can actually be hours. She likened the World Wide Web to a self-guided book without an ending.

Still, during those years, it was at least an endless book that one could walk away from. The smartphone would soon change that.

An Endless Book in Our Pockets

It wasn't long ago that the internet was a fixed, shared place in our households, a physical destination in the family living room or office accessed with a bulky screen and computer tower. Today, these endless books reside in our pockets and purses.

It's a tool most of us rely upon constantly. Frankly, it's made much of our lives significantly easier and more streamlined. Answers to most questions can be found within seconds. News can be read on apps or in browsers. Long gone are the days of physical maps and printed directions. Most parents have more photographs of their children in one year than they have of their entire childhoods. You can do your banking, order food, pay for parking, watch the Doppler, schedule hair appointments, keep up with friends and family on social media or text threads, connect with communities and fandoms, and watch or listen to pretty much whatever you want at any time.

I'm not sure that anything could have really prepared us for this (or the algorithms that now guide us in finding *the next thing* in our endless book). Just as the early browsers and online service providers fought for our attention, app developers are working feverishly to find new ways to keep us engaged. For those susceptible to internet addiction, it's created previously unimaginable challenges. It's all so new and has happened so fast, we don't *really* know the implications of this.

Much of the emphasis has understandably been on the effects it has on children. Ask a parent and you'll likely find strong opinions and little consensus. In school districts across the country, school boards, administrators, and teachers are still figuring out what in the world to do about them. In recent years, outright bans are making headlines again. Other school districts allow students to use them in the hallways and lunchrooms. Some provide sealed pouches or hanging classroom cubbies.

The Millcreek School District recently made headlines with their policy revision. Previously, their policy read that electronic devices could be used before and after school, in the cafeteria, in the hallways between classes, and on the bus. In May though, the school board voted five to four to eliminate *all* use of cell phones from the first to last bell. Cell phones must remain in students' lockers. No hallways. No lunchrooms. No trips to the restroom to catch up on all of those missed notifications.

Some see such bans as common sense. It'll reduce classroom distractions and disruptions, not to mention there are countless studies on the negative effects of smartphones (and specifically social media) on mental health. The recent New York Times best-selling book *The Anxious Generation* by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt calls the childhood dependency on these gadgets as a "great rewiring" that has created a "public health emergency" for developing brains. For seven or so hours a day at school, these students will no longer be prisoners of their devices. Isn't that a *gift*?

Many feel otherwise. Smartphones and social media are simply new ways to socialize and interact with the world, neither good nor bad in and of themselves. They view these bans as reactionary and unenforceable (just ask a teenager how many peers carry vapes around school all day). Furthermore, some argue, should we not be preparing students to self-manage and use them responsibly? Numerous local parents outright said on social media that they will tell their children to defy Millcreek's new policy.

Let's be real though: it's not just the kids. Over half of adult Americans *openly* admit to their phone addictions. And with the financial incentives of how the online world functions today — it's essentially a giant advertising machine — breaking away from our phones is more difficult than ever. Massive corporations today, as Berners-Lee always feared, have disproportionate control over the web and, for many of them, they've found effective ways to exploit the addictive nature of their products. These companies *need* us to check in with their apps as frequently as possible to generate revenue, so they send us push

notifications and sounds and vibrations and create meaningless rewards and badges and streaks and leveling up systems and mini-games to entice us back.

So, how does one even begin to pinpoint if they're too dependent on their device? Dr. Young developed an Internet Addiction Diagnostic Questionnaire. If adapted specifically for smartphones, one would ask the following questions: Do you feel preoccupied by your phone? Have you repeatedly made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop phone use? Do you feel restless, moody, depressed, or irritable without it? Do you stay on your phone longer than intended? Do you use your phone as a way of escaping problems? Do you neglect routine duties and life responsibilities for your phone?

According to a 2024 poll by Pew Research Center, 72 percent teens say they feel more peaceful *without* their phones and nearly 50 percent admit simply *having* them increases their anxiety. Even knowing this, they're difficult to put down. A recent Gallup poll found that teenagers spend on average nearly five

It wasn't long ago that the internet was a fixed, shared place in our households, a physical destination in the family living room or office accessed with a bulky screen and computer tower. Today, these endless books reside in our pockets and purses.

hours per day on social media. In a study by Common Sense Media, they discovered that teenagers were receiving on average nearly 250 notifications daily. Fortunately, many teenagers are self-aware. "The good news is, many young people reported they have grown savvier about their phone's attempts to draw them in, and they're taking steps to protect their digital well-being, like setting time limits and prioritizing certain types of notifications," the report adds. Still, they conclude, "it's clear that teens are struggling to set boundaries."

Adults are struggling too. After all, they don't have parents watching over them.

A Tangled Web

Let me be clear: I have opinions, sure, but I don't have any concrete answers. Maybe this is all on my mind because my oldest son is entering middle school next year. He hasn't asked for a cell phone yet, but as more and more of his friends get them, I expect the question is coming. A few months ago, I informally surveyed a class of high schoolers on if they thought we should get him one next year. I'm not exaggerating: every single student said no. While far from scientific, there has to be *something* to that. I wasn't too surprised either. More than a few teenage students

have told me in recent years that they are nostalgic for their pre-phone lives.

Speaking of nostalgia, I think a lot about what school was like for me. I'm young enough to remember a *few* kids who had cell phones, but old enough that the vast majority of us didn't. What *did* I do with my downtime in school? I definitely read. I socialized. I daydreamed. I doodled. I wrote. I'm sure I took some naps and goofed around. I'd get bored. I'm a firm believer that a healthy amount of boredom is perfectly fine. Free and unstructured time is good for developing brains.

I'm as guilty as anyone in all of this though. As an adult, I find myself less present in the moment than I used to be due to my phone. I use my iPhone's screen time tracker to keep myself accountable. It's helpful to have concrete data as evidence that the "terminal time warp" is no joke.

As for my kids, my colleague recently invited me to a popular Facebook group called "Wait Until 8th." They advise parents to wait until eighth grade to buy children smartphones and, if anything, sticking to smartwatches and flip phones until then. "When you say yes too early to the smartphone, your kid's childhood will look different," the group argues on their website. "Let's give kids more time playing outside, exploring, reading, creating, and hanging out with friends in person."

I can't say that I disagree, but you'll find criticism of this group, too. "The 'Wait Until 8th Grade Pledge' is impractical," counters a writer who studied early childhood development. Cell phones aren't the problem, she says, it's bad habits and a lack of monitoring by parents. "It can mean your child is years behind peers in knowing how to handle themselves online," she writes. "You know your kids better than anyone. Talk with them. Set boundaries. Give explicit expectations. Have consequences if they do not follow your rules."

I mean, she's not wrong either.

Maybe this all happened so fast that we're all just making it up as we go. As with everything in life, perhaps all we can do is try to find a balance. It is important to be internet savvy, to have online literacy skills, to be able to navigate social media responsibly, but it's also important to nurture our willpower to detach and avoid dependency. For parents, it's also important to model behaviors responsibly and remember that every child is different.

Again, I don't pretend to have the answers. I *do* think many teenagers will find relief in being away from their phones during the school day. I also think, like Tim Berners-Lee suggested in the early days of the web, there should be a continual spirit of openness to work together to solve these problems.

"All he wanted to do was share charts and graphs with other scientists," *PC Mag* wrote of Berners-Lee in 1998. "We can only imagine how much bigger his simple little idea will become in the years ahead." I think it's fair to say that his simple little idea grew quite a bit — and we're still trying to figure it all out.

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

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40 UNDER 40



Erie's 40 Under 40: Class of 2024

Celebrating 40 inspiring creative thinkers and leaders in Erie

We are living through a time on planet Earth when it can be hard to find much hope. We're getting bombarded with bad news from nearly every angle and disillusionment is a very real reaction to all that we're either experiencing or witnessing. What is it that can give us hope for the future? The answer invariably lies with our youth.

Each year for the past 12 years, the Erie Reader editors have sifted through hundreds of nominations to decide which 40 people under 40 years old should be featured. And with each of those nominations, our hope-o-meter ticks ever upward.

What is always so uplifting about this list year after year are the myriad ways that each of the honorees makes a difference in our community: through government and politics, through volunteerism, by speaking up, by lending a helping hand, by creating art, by teaching the *next* generation of leaders, or by simply following wherever their ideas and motivations lead them — by having the confidence in their own ability to make change and do good. And that should give us all hope for the future. It's right here — in Erie and among these pages, with these 40 along with the 440 who have come before them.

Won't you join us in celebrating them? The 12th Class of Erie's 40 Under 40!

Written by: Jonathan Burdick (JB), Chloe Forbes (CF), Ally Kutz (AK), Erin Phillips (EP), Cara Suppa (CS), Matt Swanseger (MS), Amy VanScoter (AVS), and Nick Warren (NW)

All photography by Jessica Hunter

Do you know someone you would like to see in an upcoming class? Our online nominations for 2025's class are now open! Just visit eriereader.com/40under40nomination

Jonathan Atkinson, 36
Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor and Homeless Care Program Manager, Erie VA Medical Center



An Erie native, Atkinson has dedicated his career to serving minority veterans in our community. A graduate of Cathedral Preparatory School and Gannon University — from 2020 to 2023, he served as the minority veterans program coordinator for the Erie VA Medical Center.

Atkinson and his colleagues received the 2022 Excellence in Government Gold Award for their collective efforts in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. "Minority veterans have historically been overlooked and may not have received the VA services to which they were entitled. To be able to provide a sense of comfort and advocacy to our veterans who may feel as if they don't belong, or who have had negative past experiences, has been a tremendous honor," he said. The Homeless Care Program was nationally recognized for their efforts in helping the National VA reach their goal of housing 38,000 Veterans in 2023. "Although we may not have the sheer volume of homeless population in comparison to

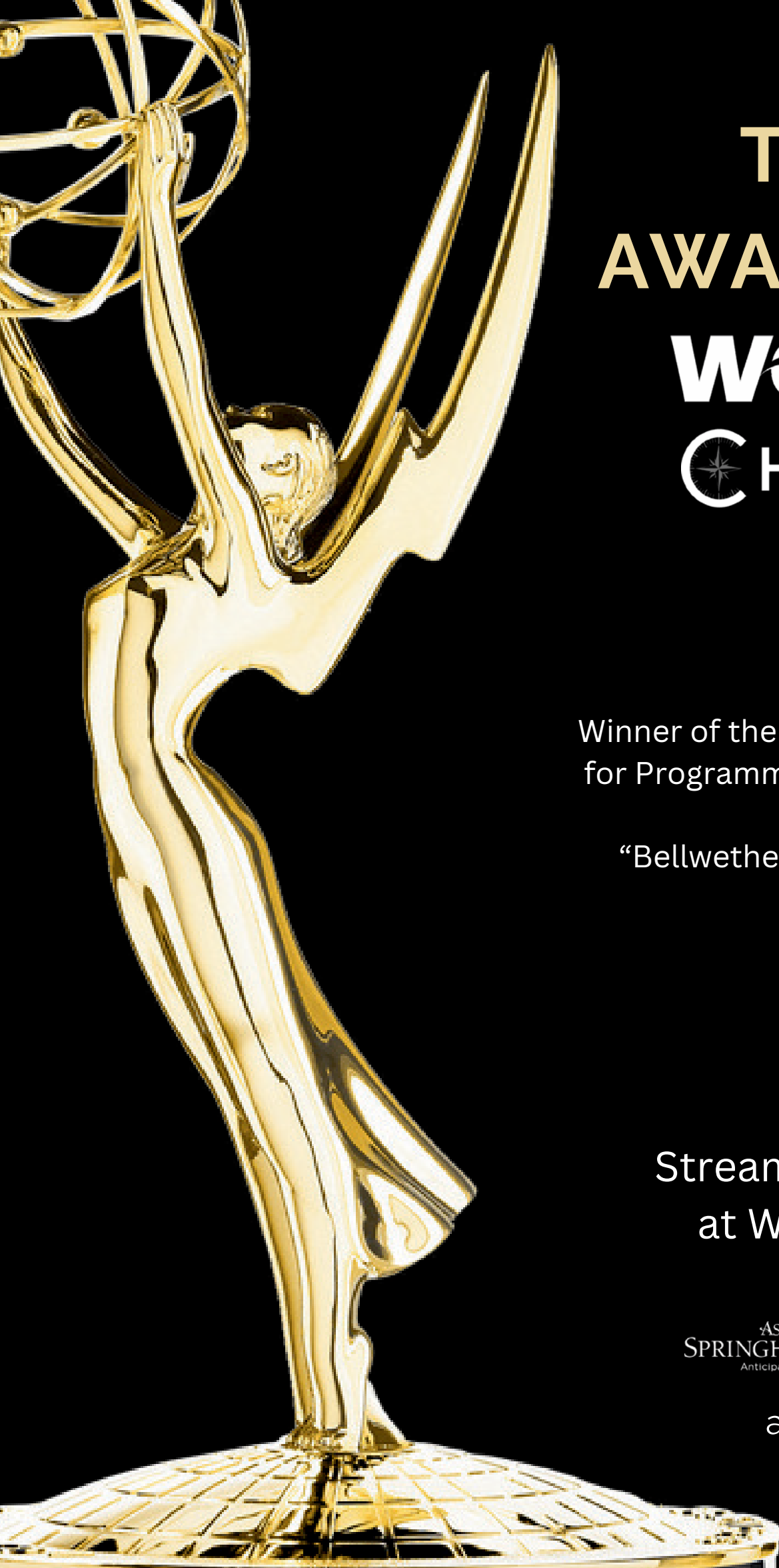
larger cities, our Homeless Care Program finished fifth nationally in completion percentage. This was a proud moment for our program, and a testament to the work that our staff completes on a daily basis to support our homeless veterans in Erie."

A member of the Erie County Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission, Atkinson is in his second and final term, serving as committee vice chairman and chairman of the Grants Review Committee. During his time on the commission, he is proud of the \$200,000 in Generational Impact grants they have provided to support projects that will have tremendous impact for BIPOC individuals and communities living in Erie County. In 2023, the commission awarded \$300,800 to 29 BIPOC-owned small businesses to supplement the hardships experienced from COVID. In 2024, The Erie County DEI commission awarded \$291,500 to 25 small businesses for the same purpose. In addition, the commission created a small business fund to support business growth and advance equity for BIPOC owned businesses who have historically been marginalized.

When he is not working, Atkinson says he enjoys spending time at Presque Isle State Park, Asbury Park, and the Erie Zoo with his wife and their 1-year-old son. He is looking forward to taking his son to his first basketball game this fall. "My wife and I are expecting our second child, and look forward to meeting our baby girl in July. Family is highly important to me, and my biggest reason for staying in Erie. I try to spend time with my family as often as possible. We usually gather for Sunday dinner." — AVS

Eric Anthony Berdis, 34
Artist and Educator

Some artists draw from the darkness for their expression; but for others, like Eric Anthony Berdis, it is in joy



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Congratulations to
JENNY TOMPKINS

for being recognized in Erie's 40 Under 40. Jenny is a committed advocate for the Lake Erie Watershed at local council meetings and community events, and in the halls of Harrisburg and D.C. She is fighting for investments and policies to protect and restore water quality, repair aging infrastructure, and protect human health from toxic pollution.



Congratulations to
Ja'Leesa Williams

Owner of Sew Royalty on being selected for Erie's 40 Under 40, Class of 2024!





where they find their inspiration and their passion.

"In periods of instability, insecurity, and oppression, I, as a Queer maker, continuously find ways to imagine and embody joy through my practice," he explained. "Quilting and fiber practices have a long history of leisure and making for pleasure. For Queer artists like myself, joy is an act of resilience — a critical method of subverting hegemonic narratives of suffering."

Their work, which combines quilting and fiber arts with sculpture, has been exhibited at Kutztown University, Illinois State University, Practice Gallery in Philadelphia, and the Waterloo Arts Center in Cleveland, among others. They were also recognized as the 2023 Lydia McCain Mid-Career Artist Fellow for Erie Arts and Culture.

Berdis, a graduate of Iroquois High School and multiple-degree holder (including an MFA and M.Ed.), is not just an artist, spreading their creativity through their pieces; they are also an educator, who will be moving out of the Erie area soon to pursue their Ph.D. in art education at Penn State University.

"I am passionate about arts education for early learners," they said. "My students are incredible and have taught me so much from the play and work we create together. There's never a dull moment."

Further, Berdis cites their partner Alex as an instrumental part of their creative and professional journey and they spend their time outside of work creating, gardening, and walking their dog Tuxedo.

"Some days joy is hard to find, but the joy that does eventually come also brings joy for the future," Berdis said. — CS

Raven Clark-Steves, 28
Owner, Raven Clark Consulting



After spending years organizing programs at the Jefferson Educational Society (JES) as their programming and marketing coordinator, Raven Clark-Steves has

recently set off on her own by launching Raven Clark Consulting, which is a strategic communications consulting business calling on her professional experience and educational training in marketing, advertising, branding, and public relations.

This Villa Maria Academy graduate earned her bachelor's degree in political science at Allegheny University and her master's in communication from Syracuse University. She has put these degrees to great use as part of Erie's Think Tank — she spearheaded JES satellite programming, helping to bring thought-provoking speakers and workshops to areas of the city and county that don't have easy access to the JES main campus (e.g. Corry, Edinboro, the east side of Erie, and West Millcreek) as well as operating their budding youth civic education and leadership program.

As part of the Erie Democratic Party's Black Caucus, the political is personal to Clark-Steves: "I dream of an inclusive and prosperous Erie. I dream of our inner-city neighborhoods and rural communities being rich in resources and thriving with opportunities for their residents. Erie is my home; a beautiful little slice of paradise on the lake that all residents should be able to enjoy and prosper in."

When she's not working on making Erie a more inclusive, educated, and open place, she enjoys reading, playing the violin, and spending time outdoors with her new spouse: "I married my wonderful husband Shannon this year, on the day of the solar eclipse. I'm a proud member of the LGBTQIA+ (pansexual/Queer) and disabled communities. I've struggled with mental illness for 15 years, and I want those who share similar struggles to know that a happy, fulfilling life is possible, and that you can make an impact in your community." — EP

Deonte Cooley, 38
Assistant Director of Community Engagement,
Mercyhurst University / Realtor, Agresti Real Estate



This Central High School graduate and father of eight is a self-described "beacon of hope." After earning his bachelor's degree in sociology, he has gone on to pursue his master's degree in organizational leadership at Mercyhurst University, all while constantly working to create avenues of growth for folks in Erie who haven't traditionally had them.

If someone had to describe Deonte Cooley in one word, that word might be "tireless." His nominator, Amanda Duncan (Erie's 40 Under 40 class of 2020), describes him as "one of those unassuming figures who goes out, does good, and never draws any attention to himself. He's doing it because he genuinely loves his

community and wants to lift up those around him. He is always encouraging others, creating pathways to success, and creating innovative new ways to crush the status quo."

Above and beyond his duties at Mercyhurst University and as a realtor for Agresti Real Estate, Cooley is a board member of Erie DAWN, a committee member of the Athletics Facilities Committee through Erie's Public Schools, and a Radius CoWork Space member. He currently runs a group called "The Manifestation Team" which meets bi-weekly to discuss plans, ideas, and progress. He has created an LLC called Cooley's Strategies and Solutions, as well as a nonprofit organization called Community for Unity and Opportunity, on top of being a drug and alcohol counselor to those in state correctional institutions — being a tireless "beacon of hope" to those at their most hopeless.

For Cooley, this is all part of paying it forward. He reflects, "My grandfather has played a major role in the man that I have become today and I honor him and mention him daily. My former football coach Patrick DiPaolo believed in me when no one else did, and told me he would not allow me to waste my life. Had it not been for him and his encouragement, I would not have gone to college and may not have become the man I am today." — EP

Katherine Dahlkemper-Yezzi, 30
Co-Owner, Dahlkemper's Jewelry Connection



Dahlkemper's has been a household name in the Erie region for more than 60 years, and Katherine Dahlkemper-Yezzi plans to keep it that way for many more years to come. As a third-generation co-owner of the family business, Katherine knows more than a thing or two about jewelry: "One might say that I was born into the jewelry industry, and they would be correct," she said.

For Katherine, going into the family business has always been the plan. "As a child, I used to nap under my mom's work desk," she said, recalling evenings in the store working on homework before helping to clean and organize drawers.

Katherine developed her passion for the jewelry industry while earning her bachelor's degree in marketing and consumer psychology at Penn State Behrend, and went on to earn her master's in organizational leadership with a focus in strategy and innovation from Mercyhurst University. "During my master's program, I started to develop relationships and friendships with clients, and they started coming in asking for me," she said. "They wanted to work with me because they trusted me, and they enjoyed my personality and perspec-

tive — that feeling has always stuck with me.”

Aside from her roles in the store — Katherine is also part of Retail Jewelers Organization (RJO)’s Next Gen network, a group of next-generation independent jewelers under 40 throughout the US. In 2022, she was selected by Jewelers of America as one of the Top 20 Jewelers under 40 in the U.S., a highly regarded award in the industry that celebrates young professionals who exemplify leadership skills.

Katherine utilizes the store’s position to help in the community whenever possible. “I try to fulfill as many donation requests as we possibly can to help raise money for dozens of nonprofit organizations in the area,” Katherine said. Within the past few years, Katherine has volunteered her time with the Upper Room of Erie, Community Shelter Services of Erie, Emma’s Footprints, and New Blossoms New Life.

When not running operations at the store or helping in the community, Katherine enjoys Erie sunsets and local live music as well as traveling and experiencing new cultures, food, people, and ways of life. She stays busy and active alongside her husband Justin, her bonus (i.e. step) daughter Natalie, and their family dog, Marley. — AK

Brendan Daugherty, 34

Scenic Shop Manager, Erie Playhouse / Adjunct Theatre Professor, Penn State Behrend



Dimension, dynamics, range — these are attributes that distinguish both performance and production. Multidimensional, dynamic, and wide-ranging, Brendan Daugherty has established a commanding presence in the Erie theater scene.

Most recently he has lent his sonorous voice to *The Selfish Giant* (with Erie Opera Theatre) and Erie Philharmonic Pops Series productions *Rodgers and Hammerstein in Concert* (2022) and *Broadway in Concert* (2024), adding to a lengthy list of performing credits with the Erie Playhouse, the former Riverside Inn, PACA, Corella Productions, and Gannon University extending all the way back to 2012. He has been nominated for Best Actor in our Best of Erie Awards several times, winning the honor in 2018 and finishing as a runner-up in 2022.

But as comfortable as Daugherty is in the spotlight, he is just as happy in the background as a director and set designer, ceding center stage to his many appreciative understudies. The Northwestern High School and Edinboro University graduate generously and selflessly splits his time between work and play(s) — dozens upon dozens of youth, high school, college, and community theater productions all across the region.

Aside from double duty as an adjunct professor at

Penn State Behrend (teaching principles of stagecraft and technical theater) and the scenic shop manager at the Erie Playhouse (building the sets for all its shows and handling rentals of those production assets), Daugherty lends his talents to the General McLane and McDowell theater programs, as well as the choir at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. A father of two and mentor to many, Daugherty has impacted thousands of students and volunteers over his young and prolific career.

Says nominator and 2023 40 Under 40 honoree Will Steadman: “Brendan demonstrates what hard work truly encompasses and does so with unrivaled kindness.” — MS

Ryan Dawley, 39

Audio Supervisor, Chronicles / Actor / Podcaster



If you’ve paid attention to local theater or local media at all in the past few years, you probably already know who Ryan Dawley is. Maybe you’ve seen him on stage all around the region. Maybe you’ve listened to his podcast, *Spotlight 814*, or maybe you’ve seen the Emmy Award-winning WQLN series, *Chronicles*. He’s a pretty busy guy to say the least, and our area is lucky to have him.

Having lived and performed in 12 different countries, this Gannon alum is a musical theater veteran. Not content to stay anchored on one stage or even one city, he’s landed key roles at the Erie Playhouse (*Tootsie, Beautiful*), PACA (the upcoming *Avenue Q*), Meadville’s Academy Theatre (*Cabaret, Rent*), and the Franklin’s Barrow-Civic Theatre (*Jesus Christ Superstar*).

It’s that nomadic mindset that made him the perfect person to launch *Spotlight 814*, a podcast and website devoted to local theater that’s not strictly confined to Erie’s city limits. Delivering in-depth coverage and reviews of local productions, Dawley goes above and beyond the scope of the Erie Reader’s traditional coverage, in what is truly a labor of love. “The reason I decided to start *Spotlight 814* is to bring awareness to, and celebrate the incredible talent gracing our stages in and around Erie. There is *so much* talent in this region, and each and every person brave enough to participate deserves to be celebrated, including the actors, production crews, sound and lighting designers, set designers, costume makers, prop masters, makeup artists, and stage crew,” Dawley detailed. No stranger to the microphone, he’s also one of the co-hosts of the beloved local podcast *Idiotville*, as well.

His upcoming project is something deeply personal, as he plans to host a podcast to boost awareness for Parkinson’s Disease, which he was diagnosed with this year.

If all those bona fides weren’t enough, his day job is bringing just as much worthy attention to the Erie area. As the audio supervisor of *Chronicles* for WQLN/PBS/NPR, he’s in charge of the sound of the acclaimed original program, which took home a Great Lakes Emmy Award this June. — NW

Abby DeSantis, 28

Owner/Operator, Meals with Abs



In an ideal world, we’d all have the time to prepare nutritious homemade meals that nourish us and our families, but in the event that isn’t the case, the next best thing is a business dreamed into reality by Abby DeSantis: Meals with Abs, which meal preps nutritious and delicious breakfasts, lunches, and dinners for delivery and pick-up for Erie’s residents.

The McDowell grad went to Penn State University for her bachelor’s and has additionally gained a certification from the Institute for Integrative Nutrition, as well as being a certified Holistic Nutrition Coach. What started as a side gig has since turned into a full-fledged setup, complete with a commercial kitchen.

“Being able to help people while doing something I absolutely love is so rewarding,” DeSantis said. “Building a business from the ground up has made me really proud. I had zero background in business, but I just went for it, and I am so glad I did.”

Her nominator agrees: “Abby opened up a whole new portal in Erie’s food experience. She makes food that is nourishing and delicious. Now, [people] are able to access meals that help us all perform and experience life in a better way.”

In her spare time, DeSantis enjoys exploring Erie, heading outdoors to spaces like Asbury Woods and Scott Park, binge-watching food videos on TikTok, and spending time with her 9-year-old pitbull rescue, Sky.

And when not busy with Meals with Abs, DeSantis volunteers — and adores her work — with Erie’s Public Schools’ ANCHOR and SAIL programs, teaching elementary school and middle school kids how to cook.

Reflecting on her work, DeSantis said, “I hope to continue to add to the quality of life of people in Erie and to make life easier, more convenient, and a whole lot sweeter.” As it turns out, she already has. — CS

Margaret Dieudonne, 32

Advanced Lead Engineer, Wabtec / Executive Director, Eerie Horror Fest

Margaret Dieudonne is described by those who know her as remarkable, brilliant, and a focused leader. She grew up in Miami, Florida, the daughter of a Colombian mother and Haitian father (resulting in her being able



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CONGRATULATIONS!



DEONTE COOLEY
40 UNDER 40 HONOREE

Congratulations to Deonte Cooley, Mercyhurst University's coordinator of service and justice, on being recognized in Erie's 40 Under 40, Class of 2024! We're proud to have you on our community engagement team.



MERCYHURST
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to speak English, Spanish, French, and Haitian Kreyol), where she graduated from Coral Reef Senior High School. She then attended Rice University, earning her bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and then received a master's in electrical and computer engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Today, Dieudonne is the advanced lead engineer at Erie's Wabtec Corporation. She works with customers to devise requirements to create new locomotive strategies that protect the engine, improve diagnostics, and ensure our locomotive engines meet EPA standards. She also leads engineers on various projects to coordinate tasks and communicate between locomotive subsystems. She even has her own patent.

After a decade in Erie, she enjoys living here and plans on staying. "I strive to show people Erie through my eyes, a place that has helped me see what it means to have a community support you and your local business because they care to see it succeed," Dieudonne says. This is in reference to her *other* role: executive director of the beloved Eerie Horror Fest. She works hard to organize a "spooky atmosphere" for the festival while curating global film submissions, vendors, workshops, and panels with industry professionals, celebrity guests, and a kid-friendly film with trick-or-treating.

She also serves on the board of the Film Society of Northwestern Pennsylvania, is an active member of Wabtec's African Heritage Forum (AHF), and has previously held roles as Erie site leader and global program manager in an effort to highlight the achievements of Black employees and the importance of professional development, mentorship, and allyship.

Outside of those roles, she enjoys spending time with her dad, her cat (Minerva), and her friends, as well as the deep conversations about life that come with this. She loves music, everything from opera to reggaeton to synth-pop. She is passionate about fashion and history too and enjoys watching period pieces which combine both. — JB

Colleen Dougherty, 26

Research Officer, The Nowak Metro Finance Lab at Drexel University

Colleen Dougherty is a problem-solver — in her career, she tackles the challenges that face metro areas like Erie, studying the way issues impact these communities and actively seeking out ways to positively shape the futures of these areas.

Born and raised in Erie, Colleen attended Fairview High School before earning her BA in Philosophy, Law, and Politics from John Carroll University and her MA in

German and European Studies (MAGES) from Georgetown University.

In her work as a research officer with the Nowak Metro Finance Lab at Drexel University, Colleen dedicates her time to not only identifying challenges and opportunities in cities and metros, but also aims to apply solutions that will help foster sustainable development: "I am deeply passionate about leveraging innovative approaches to address the evolving needs of our communities," she said. "My work involves not just studying existing solutions, but actively shaping the future of urban development through deep, objective research on innovative financial instruments and inclusive financial strategies."



Colleen's passion for Erie inspires much of the work she does — after living in Washington, D.C. for four years, she recently moved back to Erie as a fully remote employee so she could continue her research and eventually apply it in ways that will directly benefit our own city. "Ensuring that Erie thrives in the face of evolving economic landscapes requires a commitment to both capturing proven solutions and pioneering new pathways for sustainable and inclusive economic development," she said, something that her research aims to achieve.

Colleen also leads the group "Perspectives for the Future, Respect, and Participation" as a non-resident fellow with Das Progressive Zentrum, a think tank of professionals based in Berlin. "Together, we delve into the complex issues impacting industrial heartlands across the transatlantic," she said. This work has afforded her the opportunity to create international connections and champion Erie at conferences and in spaces on the international stage.

In Erie, Colleen has delved right back into community involvement in the months she's been back — she is a member of the Transforming Industrial Heartlands Regional Initiative that is run out of the Jefferson Educational Society, as well as a member of the Erie Women's Fund and Emerging Erie Fund. — AK

Emma Eisert-Wlodarczyk, 31

School Engagement Director, American Heart Association / Owner, Polliwogs Gym

Emma Eisert-Wlodarczyk, a graduate of the University of Dayton with a Bachelor of Science in Pre-Medicine, is the school engagement director for the American Heart Association. In this role, she works with school communities across northwestern Pennsylvania to implement life-saving initiatives, provide service-learning opportunities, and support the health and wellness

goals of the individual school districts.

She's also a small business owner, having opened Polliwogs Gym in the Colony Plaza this past October. She's been thrilled by the support from the Erie community. "Erie supports Erie," she says, adding that the encouragement from her friends and family is what made her dream a reality.

"I am so lucky to be able to provide Erie families with a safe space for the youngest members of our community (four months to eight years) to develop their motor skills, gain confidence in themselves, and experience positive social interactions all while learning through play," she explains. Having spent years participating in and coaching gymnastics, this was always an idea in the back of her mind. On top of overseeing day-to-day operations, she also develops curriculum used in their classes and directly works with the children to teach all sorts of skills.

Through both of her jobs, Eisert-Wlodarczyk gets to work with the community's youth. "By supporting their well-being physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally, we are positively impacting the next generation of community members and potential leaders," she says. "I hope to continue to provide children and their families with opportunities for positive development and to be a resource for the Erie community for years to come!"



In her spare time, she enjoys traveling. She lived and worked in Spain and also backpacked across Europe. She loves being outdoors, whether it's taking neighborhood strolls, walking county trails, running a marathon, or learning to ski. She also likes spending time with friends and family, visiting the many local breweries and coffee shops, and is perfectly content curling up with a good book. Also, soon after this issue drops, she'll be marrying her fiance Sean at the Presque Isle Lighthouse.

While she was born in Dayton, Ohio and lived in Georgia and Alabama due to her mother's military assignments, she moved here in 2003 and graduated from McDowell High School. "I consider Erie as my hometown," she says — and Erie is lucky to have her. — JB

Cypher Eihwaz, 29

Owner and Event Coordinator, OddCity Entertainment / General Manager, Basement Transmissions / Graphic Designer / Vocalist

A few years ago, when Odd Atrocity burst onto our local music scene, you knew they had something special. They blended a DIY punk ethos, smatterings of hippie culture, and a healthy bit of conscious activism. The



face of that band is their vocalist Cypher Eihwaz. From what began as a garage band, they were able to craft a collection of events, uniting performers, and creating media all with a shared mission.

In addition to serving as vocalist of Odd Atrocity, Eihwaz also fronts the band Isle of Dread, who released their debut album in 2023, and also recorded guest vocals for Northbound Soul. This is all coming from someone who still suffers from terrible stage fright.

Odd Atrocity shows were always different, with the band offering free drug-testing kits and Narcan spray (for emergency use in an opioid overdose) alongside stickers, t-shirts, and handmade bracelets at their merch table, or organizing food or clothing drives at events.

The band, along with like-minded groups like Dumpster Garden, helped build the brand and vision of Odd-City Entertainment. Eihwaz and OddCity have launched annual events such as the Violet Gathering (to help victims of domestic violence) and Rainbow Fest (which features LGBTQIA+ artists), along with the Basement of Terror, Grunge Night, and Noob Night (for beginning performers). They've also launched a podcast, *Honestly Odd*, and a nonprofit for harm reduction advocacy, Atrocity Prevention.

They also have two children with their husband Uriah, who they have been happily with since their days at General McLane high school. Their family also includes two dogs and a cat, along with a revolving door of animals that Cypher helps to rehabilitate, most recently a flying squirrel.

The former volunteer firefighter is also a longtime stick and poke tattoo artist, as well as providing graphic design for OddCity and From the Ashes Promotions. — NW

Jonathan (Jonny) Evans, 36

Booking Agent/Manager, King's Rook Club / Cross-Trained Agent, American Airlines / DJ and Rapper

Jonny Evans is always working. Whether he's booking and managing the diverse slate of musicians, DJs, and artists at the local, long-standing King's Rook Club, helping organize flights through American Airlines, writing or performing music with the Lower Eastside Connection (who had the honor of opening for Flo Rida during 2023's Celebrate Erie mainstage celebration — Evans' third appearance on the mainstage), collaborating with other artists on videos and projects, drywalling a rental apartment, organizing poetry nights and music series, or DJ-ing an event — he pretty much never stops. He jokes, "No matter the season or the time of day, I'm always doing something. I haven't been bored

in a long time."

This NWPACollegiate Academy graduate went on to earn his bachelor's in broadcast and print journalism from Penn State University — but quickly realized that music was his passion-pursuit and gave him the ability to make the most positive impact in Erie. He reflects, "As I've navigated different areas of life, I've found purpose in writing and performing music. I strive to be an artist who inspires and gives hope, encouraging others to chase their dreams and be their authentic selves ... And I book bands and musicians and give them an opportunity to play in a cool venue with great audio and lighting, and help to put some money in their pockets so that they can continue playing. I believe in Erie and I believe in the people here and I'm simply proud to be a small part of it all."



When Evans isn't doing one of his multiple jobs, he enjoys being outdoors, kayaking and camping, or collecting sports jerseys and vintage video game consoles. He credits his family and idyllic childhood for starting him down a path to personal success. In his words, "I'm lucky to have the family I have and anything that I do that's a positive contribution to this planet or to this city is a testament to them. I just aspire to be like them and carry on their legacy." — EP

Francesca Fee, 32

Director, Erie Insurance Heritage Center, Archives, and Art Collection



Francesca Fee's life imitates art. This multi-faceted, multi-talented, well-traveled woman is deeply knowledgeable on subjects ranging from Baroque and Renaissance Italian art to SCUBA diving and cataloging historic shipwrecks. And learning everything she can about those subjects that interest her has led her to becoming the director for Erie Insurance's corporate museum, The Heritage Center, as well as being the art curator for all of the company's in-house art — which is

extensive, and all sourced from local artists.

Hailing originally from Ellwood, Pennsylvania, Fee came to Erie to attend Penn State Behrend, earning her bachelor's in art history before going on to earn her master's degree in the same subject. She is currently a breath away from earning her doctorate from Rutgers University, where she became an Excellence Fellow (which helps support her research in Italy), as well as teaching online art history courses for the school. She published her work on the artist Valentin de Boulogne in an international, peer-reviewed volume, which earned her the Olga Berendsen Prize at Rutgers University.

When Fee isn't in a museum, gallery, classroom, or archives, she enjoys being in or on the water, in whatever way possible. Last year, she received her certification for the Pennsylvania Archaeology Shipwreck and Survey Team (PASST) and now regularly dives on historic shipwrecks in Lake Erie. She is also in the midst of learning to sail and is crewing on a boat in the Erie Yacht Club Racing Fleet.

While she often travels extensively, Fee is proud to call Erie her home base and has recently purchased a historic home she's working to restore. She reflects, "With my background in the arts, I love aiding in preserving our city's rich past for future generations, whether it's helping to document and research a shipwreck or work of art, or serving as a steward of Erie Insurance's nearly 100 years of history." — EP

Craig Flint, 38

Meteorologist, WJET/WFXP TV



What is it that makes someone want to tune into any certain local channel to watch the news? Invariably the answer is the personalities — the anchorpersons, the on-site reporters, the meteorologists. Anyone who has seen Craig Flint deliver the local weather report in his spot on *Good Morning Erie* on WJET 24/WFXP 66 can attest to the fact that it is his personality that keeps us perpetually tuning in to see more. Few have the experiential knowledge, the theatrical nature, and, quite simply, the infectious love of weather that Flint has, and his passion shines through every time he's on air.

This Penn State University graduate has always had an interest in weather — he jokes, "Just ask my mom!" And this interest has led Flint to follow a path that has taken him to his dream job: "It has been a life long dream of mine to be a TV weather guy. I took a circuitous route to my career and there were several rough patches, but in the end, I'm reminded of a famous Frank Sinatra song titled 'I Did It My Way' and here I am, living my childhood dream!"

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The news can often be a drag, and Flint prides himself as being able to provide some moments of levity during a broadcast that might contain upsetting, divisive, or just plain bad news. “Weather is something we all experience and talk about on the daily and that gives me a little more latitude as opposed to being a journalist; it allows me to have a little more of an opinion. Weather is subjective — some people like lazy, hazy, hot summer days, others prefer a raging blizzard. It’s pretty cool and I like to have fun with it.”

Flint’s passion doesn’t start and stop with weather — he is committed to Erie and is excited to stick around. He reflects, “I jumped at the opportunity to come back to Erie. The call was just too strong. You cannot deny the vibe or the energy in the air here.” — EP

Jordan Fuller, 28

Director of Entrepreneurship, Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership



Considerable change takes vision, and Jordan Fuller has his sights set on redefining what a successful entrepreneurial ecosystem is. But before an ecosystem can flourish, the proper conditions must be cultivated. By creating and implementing a streamlined framework for economic development in Erie County, Fuller has helped do just that.

As the director of entrepreneurship for the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership (ERCGP), his focus is on creating spaces that make it easier to invest in and grow businesses. The ERCGP offers three avenues for entrepreneurs in Erie — the FIRE accelerator, a global catalyst for startups to build their legacies in the Erie region that Jordan designed while working for the Erie Innovation District; the ICE Angel Education Program, which educates potential investors; and the ICE Angel Fund, which provides a mechanism to deploy those investments to local entrepreneurs.

The ICE Angel Fund recently made its first investment in a local company — Blind Tiger, a woman-owned business (2016 40 Under 40 honoree Rebecca Styn) that creates and sells Prohibition Era-inspired mocktails.

“He’s crafted a remarkable incubation program that has seen dozens of entrepreneurs connect with Erie talent and industry,” said nominator Sean Fedorko of Radius CoWork (Erie’s 40 Under 40 class of 2016). “Without his efforts, Erie would have fewer jobs, fewer businesses, and most importantly, less confidence in itself to invest and grow.”

Jordan continues to conduct research, mentor business owners, lead a collaborative leadership committee, and organize new events. He co-directed Startup Grind Erie, a Google-backed initiative sponsoring local

entrepreneurial education and networking events, and is involved in numerous organizations across northwestern Pennsylvania.

“I have a policy that I am always a yes, and I will always have 30 minutes for a meeting, whether that is to talk through an issue, discuss a new idea, or to vent about something that is challenging in your business,” Jordan said. “If there is a way that I can help, I will make that happen.” — CF

Amberlee Glazier, 36

Children’s Librarian, Erie County Public Library



Amberlee Glazier is changing what it means to do things by the books. The children’s librarian-extraordinaire is at the helm of various civic engagement efforts to ensure equitable opportunities for the next generation.

Glazier originally wanted to become a human rights attorney and interned as a field organizer with the Human Rights Campaign in California during the 2008 election, but she found her calling closer to home. Amberlee’s accolades cover a range of political and information sciences as activism is at the heart of everything she does.

During the pandemic, she led the Book Box initiative, a take-home reading program for families to share during the shutdown. The boxes included a free copy of a book, a family discussion guide, and three to four activities with supplies and instructions — an effort that made it possible for families to remain connected to the library and early literacy programs while under quarantine.

In 2021, the Pennsylvania Library Association awarded the Erie County Public Library’s children’s librarian team the Best Practices Award for a civic engagement display. The team organized a “Best Pet” election, complete with voter registration forms and library precincts to familiarize children and their families with the electoral process. The contest runs concurrently with major national elections.

“The library is the only place where everyone in our community — regardless of age, socioeconomic status, or background — has free and equal access to materials, services, and learning experiences,” she said. “My job is to help provide materials and experiences that enrich their lives and help them grow into lifelong readers and learners.”

Outside the library, she’s a church school instructor and designs summer programming for St. Mark’s Episcopal Church. Previously known as Manic Pixie Demon Girl, her skating days with Erie Roller Derby came to a

close as an injury sidelined her, so now she spends her spare time with her wonderful new spouse, two stepchildren, and their family zoo made up of two dogs, a cat, a rabbit, two snakes, a leopard gecko, a turtle, and assorted fish. — CF

Ryan Hoover, 34

Experience Director, Erie Downtown Development Corporation



As soon as you meet Ryan Hoover, you understand what an important piece of the puzzle he is. That puzzle? Downtown Erie. Thanks to Hoover’s engagement and unbridled enthusiasm for what he does, he’s literally making Erie a better place.

It’s kind of his job.

As experience director for the Erie Downtown Development Corporation (EDDC), he works with fellow 2024 40 Under 40 honoree and Executive Director Drew Whiting to steer the organization in the right direction and to have a good time doing it. With the ASCEND climbing wall open for business (and the obvious upward mobility metaphors that come with it) and the Flagship City Food Hall now a tentpole destination downtown, the EDDC is well into their next phase of operation.

He’s also happy to do his part in his hometown of Harborcreek, too. Hoover, his wife Kalie, and his son Aiden relocated there after living in Orlando for years (they’re still avid Disney World fans). A member of the Community Engagement Team, he’s helped organize events like Fall Fest, Harborcreek Light Up Night, and more, not to mention the immersive haunted house he helped design and construct for HarborCreep Nights.

Thanks to his event programming alone, he’s making a difference. Setting up music and other experiences at the Food Hall (complete with his impressive photography), outdoor sets along the Shops at 5th and State (e.g., the 429 Alley Parties), and more, Hoover is making Downtown Erie a place people want to be.

That was exactly what one of his first tasks was, too. Hoover helped market the first wave of apartments, renting out 42 units in three months. They currently manage 104 apartments.

“I’ve surrounded myself with positive Downtown Erie supporters. There’s a dedicated group of people who truly want to make Downtown Erie a better place for the next generation of visitors. With this fantastic group of people, we’ll get it done.” — NW

Alexandria Iwanenko, 29
Associate Attorney, Amicangelo & Theisen,
Immigration Law



Growing up, Alexandria was no stranger to other cultures: as the granddaughter of immigrants from Italy, Poland, Ukraine, and Vietnam, her childhood was immersed in traditions from all over the world. It only made sense that this exposure would spark an interest that would follow her through school and lead her to the work she does today.

Originally from Buffalo, Alexandria graduated from Canisius College with a triple major BA in International Relations, Spanish, and Latin American Studies, and earned her JD from Duquesne University School of Law. At both schools, she earned Distinguished Student Awards and graduated with summa cum laude honors.

As an associate attorney with Amicangelo & Theisen, Immigration Law, Alexandria applied that interest from her childhood to helping those in need. She represents clients in front of immigration judges in both Buffalo and Philadelphia, as well as traveling with clients for naturalization and green card interviews and for affirmative asylum interviews.

One of her proudest accomplishments is her work with the Afghan community: "In August 2021, after the fall of the Kabul government, the U.S. relocated over 70,000 Afghans [to the U.S.] without much of a plan," Alexandria said. "Our firm stepped in to help and I have assisted 20 Afghans in receiving grants of asylum approval and over 50 Afghans in receiving their permanent resident card to be able to remain in the U.S. The Afghans were there to support the U.S. when the country needed it most, as interpreters and soldiers for the military, and now I get to do my part to pay it back to them — it is one of the most rewarding parts of my job."

Alexandria's community commitment extends past her career as an associate attorney. She serves in a number of positions across multiple organizations, including the Multicultural Health Evaluation and Delivery Systems (MHEDS) as a board member, Northwestern Legal Services (board member, strategic planning and governance committees), and the Academy for Human Rights (board member and governance committee chair).

"I truly want to make Erie a better place for everyone — I have always wanted to be a voice for the voiceless," Alexandria expressed. "I can use my privilege to advo-

cate for others, and work with and for the community. The community knows what they need, and we have to listen to them and respond accordingly."

Outside of work, Alexandria enjoys spending time at Presque Isle with her 1-year-old daughter, Anastasia, and her husband, Adam, and is looking forward to sharing Mommy and Me dance classes with her daughter as she grows. — AK

Andre Jones, 37
Art Director, Blavity / Creative Director,
Rabbit 3 Studio



Who is Andre Jones? A talented designer who has worked with some of the music industry's hottest artists and a down-to-earth creative uplifting Erie's Black community through fashion, immersive events, and workshops. But, that is just the tip of the iceberg.

An Erie native, Jones graduated from Central High School and Edinboro University's graphic design program. His education served him well because he uses those skills to create his clothing designs while also marketing and promoting them — all while serving as an art director for Blavity, a media company based in Los Angeles.

A true visionary, his approach to fashion has landed him well-known clients like Lizzo, designing looks for her European Tour in 2018. Pieces of his clothing were featured on Showtime's *The Chi* (2022). He also "ghost designs" merch and apparel for streetwear brands and music artists, some of which you may have seen in editorials, publications, and on television. Jones says much of his apparel work is inspired by the 1980s, *Sailor Moon*, or *Kill Bill*. His fashions emphasize multi-functionality and high wearability, with most pieces having a transformative property to make them more sustainable and also incredibly fun. Last year, Jones was the second place winner in Jack Daniel's "Classic Remix" design competition.

A member of Chroma Guild (established in 2019 by Erie Arts and Culture to advance access to resources and opportunities for creative and cultural professionals of color), he says he wants to provide Erie with hope, specifically for Black folks. "This place, if you allow it, can and will kill your spirits and creativity. But anything worth having is worth fighting for," he said. Despite opportunities to take his career elsewhere, Jones is committed to Erie. "I am a firm believer in God's timing.

While I am here, I know that it's His will. And I'm sure when it's time for me to go, He will most definitely let me know," Jones said.

A self-proclaimed beach bum, he says he spends hours on the beach at Presque Isle and loves dry humor, astrology, and good food.

Jones is also a competitive pole dancer and instructor at Liege Barre and Pole. He's the two-time national champion and medalist of men's pole dancing (2019, 2022, 2023) and was a bronze medalist at the 2023 Pole Sports and Arts World Federation World Championships. — AVS

Jacob Jones, 30
Director of the Center for Family Business, Penn
State Behrend

Jacob Jones has accomplished a lot in his 30 years. After graduating from Strong Vincent High School, Jones earned his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Gannon University followed by a master's degree in public administration.

He spent time in sales and marketing before working as a business consultant with Gannon University's Small Business Development Center. From 2022 to 2024, he served as executive director of Erie's Community Access Media, where, as described by those who worked with him, he worked hard to extend the community aspect of the organization, increase funding, improve transparency, broaden membership involvement, and expand educational possibilities. As of this July, he began a new position as the director of the Center for Family Business at Penn State Behrend. The center is a member-driven organization which supports the needs of local family-owned businesses.



He is also an adjunct faculty member at the Erie County Community College, where he teaches classes about entrepreneurship. If that isn't enough, he's also a registered minister having performed over 20 weddings; he's a recent graduate of the Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy; and he is currently working on a Raimy Fellowship project concerning youth mental health.

Outside of work, he spends a lot of time with his son, Kayden, and enjoys reading science fiction, boxing, camping, spending time in the woods, and fixing and building things (skills he learned from his father).

"I want to make Erie a place that people want to root their lives into," says Jones. "We live in a richly diverse,



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dynamic, and growing city that needs to overhaul its old ways of thinking. This city has so much potential and energy. I have to see how it all turns out.” — JB

Anna Lindvay, 35

**Community Advocate and Organizer / Barista,
Werner Books & Coffee**



When Anna Lindvay isn't brewing up delicious coffee concoctions at her day job as a barista at Werner Books & Coffee (whose staff recently received the inaugural Safe Space of the Year award from local nonprofit Compton's Table), she's working to make Erie a fairer, more equitable, and just place for all of our citizens.

Lindvay, an East High School graduate, works throughout the city and county, advocating for those causes that directly affect our community. She is an organizer and moderator for Project Minerva, which is a grassroots organization committed to the preservation and support of the Blasco Library; she is a member of Keep Our Library Public; she is a member and organizer with the Erie chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America; and she is a member leader with Erie County United.

The goal she shares with her fellow community organizers is to bring progressive social and political ideals to a local level of action and change.

Lindvay explains the kind of work she does, “The last time that Trump came to town, instead of simply protesting his visit, myself and others with the Democratic Socialists of America organized a mutual aid gathering in Perry Square where we platformed local progressive political candidates and managed to collect enough nonperishables to fill every Little Free Pantry within the city — turning a potentially stressful and polarizing moment into something positive and proactive for the community.”

In addition to this work, Lindvay's efforts (including deploying petitions, email campaigns, and drawing speakers and crowds to council meetings) were key in the adoption of Andre Horton's resolution to make sure that the kind of censorship that led to Pride displays being removed from the Blasco Public Library would not happen in the future.

In her own words, “I try to make Erie a better place by advancing the ideas of civic engagement, mutual aid,

and community building — and by showing that you don't need to be an elected official or have a bunch of money in order to make an impact.”

When Lindvay isn't engaging in local advocacy, she enjoys reading, playing the guitar, and gardening. She doesn't drive or own a car and hopes to never need to. And Erie is lucky to call her a permanent resident, “After leaving and returning many times, I'm now saving to buy a home here. I hope to be able to attend city council and school board meetings with the weight of being a tax-paying property owner.” — EP

Valerie Luckey, OSB, 36

Director, Emmaus Ministries



Devoting herself to a monastic lifestyle, Valerie Luckey has made it her mission to help those in need. Through her work with Emmaus Ministries, she is doing precisely that, upholding the Biblical tenets of kindness and charity in her everyday life. Part of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Luckey is living by the rule of Saint Benedict himself, to “live differently than the world's way” and to “put the Love of Christ above all else.”

While Emmaus Ministries is best known for their local soup kitchen, they also oversee the Food Pantry, Kids Cafe, Grove, and Saint Mary's Studio: A Space to Create (a flourishing studio unto itself, which The Reader covered recently).

In January 1974, the Emmaus Soup Kitchen opened its doors. It was conceived by Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, and run by Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowsky. In 1980, Sister Mary Miller was named director of Emmaus Ministries, and lovingly led the organization for over 42 years until her death. Luckey was open about her grief at Miller's passing, and publicly detailed her mixed emotions after she was named the new director.

Saint Benedict also wrote that God sometimes speaks through the youngest person in the community. With Luckey's position amongst a new generation of Sisters, she is likely to serve the region for decades to come. And this is perhaps the perfect place for her to be. After growing up in (wait for it) Emmaus, Pennsylvania and attending Emmaus High School, she received her bachelor's and master's from Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. She served nearby as a fourth grade teacher for several years before joining the Sisters. Growing up, she always wanted to be a chef, and sees this as a logical conclusion. “I believe the combi-

nation of love and creativity is the most powerful we have as humans for making positive change. For me, being in a kitchen, making a loaf of bread or a pot of soup, are the most authentic forms of love and creativity I have to offer a world in need of peace and justice.” — NW

Joey Mancuso-Ellis, 39

Owner, Sterling Rivers Spa

If beauty is power, Joey Mancuso-Ellis equips her clients with swords. As the best friend everyone deserves, Joey helps patrons feel just as beautiful on the outside as they are on the inside.

The owner of Sterling Rivers Spa is an Erie native with an extensive resume in cosmetics and esthetics. She has done wedding makeup for 20 years and began teaching master classes at her spa as her skills include facials to waxes, eyebrow tints and laminations, lash lifts and tints, hairstyling, and more.

Every October, Joey offers free eyebrow tints to breast cancer survivors. Often, women who lose their hair due to chemotherapy wear wigs or rock a bald look, but the lack of natural facial hair like eyebrows can still make women feel self-conscious. Joey helps those women regain some power during a seemingly



powerless period of their lives.

Focused heavily on wellness, Joey works to make her spa the breath of fresh air that helps her clients relax and rejuvenate. When not with clients, Joey enjoys alone time to charge her own batteries.

“I am very empathetic and can feel energy from other people. Working in a field where I'm one-on-one with people all day, it can be a lot of energy transfer for me, therefore, I really enjoy being alone,” she said. “I go to dinner by myself or take myself to the movies.”

She also loves to read, listen to podcasts, paint, garden, cook, listen to music, and spend time with her daughter (River), son (Rocco), dog (Betty), and two cats (Alvin and Sophie).

Joey is proud to be a part of the Erie community, which she sees as on the rise.

“I love to see the growth and the success of so many local businesses here,” she remarked. “I have been extremely blessed with the success of my business and owe it all to the support of the people in Erie. I think Erie is a hidden gem and I'm proud to be here and along for the ride to watch it flourish in the future.” — CF



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Courtney “Interstella” Mealy, 34
Board Chair, Erie Roller Derby / Certified
Occupational Therapy Assistant, UPMC Hamot



You may know her as “Interstella” but there’s more to Courtney Mealy than what you see on the flat track. Mealy spends the majority of her time outside of her day job at UPMC Hamot managing the day-to-day and long-range operations of Erie Roller Derby (ERD), Erie’s first and only roller derby league, established in 2010. The league is a 501(c)3 organization which is 100 percent volunteer-operated.

Mealy is from Seneca, Pennsylvania and attended Cranberry Jr./Sr. High School and Edinboro University where she received her BFA in Jewelry/Metalsmithing as well as an art education certification. Mealy also attended Mercyhurst North East for her Associate of Science, Occupational Therapy Assistant. She has served on the board of directors of Erie Roller Derby since 2019 and currently serves as the board chair.

She says that her passion is quite possibly an obsession because she is always on the lookout for ways they can improve the league and better serve their members and community. “ERD is more than just a sports team, we are a diverse group of individuals with a passion for promoting the athleticism needed for playing a full-contact sport while at the same time fostering an inclusive and transformative community that provides access to sports for women, non-binary, transgender, and gender-expansive folks,” she said.

After being heavily impacted by COVID, the league has continued to grow under her leadership. “We’ve grown to the point where we are consistently fielding two rosters of skaters for games, we have almost a full contingent of skating officials and a good number of non-skating officials, as well as a healthy base of volunteers to support our off-track endeavors. Part of this growth comes from establishing new and exciting recruitment efforts, with 2022 being the inaugural year for our new recruit Skate Camp — an eight-week program meant to get new recruits steady on their skates in a friendly and low-pressure environment,” said Mealy. She had also lead the development of a skater scholarship program which provides financial relief to folks who may not be able to afford monthly dues, co-leading a committee to establish the organization as a 501(c)3 (which they received in October 2023), and obtaining various grants and funding sources to pay for programming, events, and operations. “The thing I am most proud of is the way our organization has impacted our members on a personal level. I strive to ensure ERD is a place where people feel valued and empowered both

on and off the track,” said Mealy.

When she’s not thinking about derby or working on a derby project, Mealy likes to put together puzzles and spend time with her husband and her dog. She’s getting ready to host Erie’s first roller derby tournament in September. — AVS

Steve Mik, 39
Artist, The Looking Glass Art Project

Having grown up in Erie and graduating from Mercyhurst Prep, Steve Mik is now embedded deeply in the local art scene. As an artist, he works with The Looking Glass Art Project, which focuses on large-scale public art installations.

These have included the recently completed Union City Gateway Mural Project, which is composed of three murals depicting the importance of French Creek to the community, and the mural painted on the HANDS building on East Sixth and East Avenue called “Growth Over Guns,” which was painted with students from Erie Center for Arts and Technology. The latter is a statement about overcoming gun violence through the power of positivity. “This was a topic that the students felt very strongly about and had personal connections to,” explains Mik, “which in turn was evident by the effort and depth of their participation that resulted in a powerful finished product.”



Mik is also a teaching artist with Erie Arts and Culture, where he introduces and educates students about all types of art, focusing on harnessing their creativity to channel it into an expression of their experiences.

“It is my goal to use public art to beautify and transform our community,” Mik says. Yes, it is aesthetically pleasing, but it is also about community engagement and addressing issues positively. “This process allows people to participate in the creation of public art, while giving them a hands-on connection to the work and a lasting sense of pride that strengthens ties within the community.”

Outside of work, Mik loves spending time with his daughter and two dogs, who enjoy hiking and outdoor adventures. He is also fond of gardening, live music, and supporting local businesses and restaurants.

So, what’s next?

“I dream of painting all of the walls along the Bayfront Connector, especially the huge one along the bay,” he says. Mostly though, it’s just about sharing a common goal: “I believe that by working together and communicating, we can create a world that is not only beautiful but also safe and healthy for us, our children, and future generations.” — JB

Adam D. Nelson, 38
Financial Advisor,
Edward Jones, Wealth Management



Adam D. Nelson, a financial advisor for Edward Jones, Wealth Management, was deeply gratified to be ranked number 21 on the 2023 Forbes Best In State Next Gen Wealth Advisors in Pennsylvania.

“Being named to that list ... was a really big deal for me, as it was national recognition for what I’ve built over the past 16 years,” Nelson said. “Having been recognized within Edward Jones the past several years as being in the top 5 percent of North America, is also something I’m proud of, given we are the largest firm by advisor count in the U.S.”

The Erie-born, Erie-educated (Penn State Behrend) financial advisor opened his own Edward Jones branch in 2008 on Buffalo Road and has been there ever since.

But you would be remiss if you equated Nelson’s professional accomplishments to an all-about-work lifestyle. In fact, he has taken on many different volunteer roles in the community, including mentoring finance students, sponsoring the Harborcreek Sports Boosters, previously heading the board of the Eastside YMCA, and serving on the board of Penn State Behrend Black School of Business, the youngest-ever appointee when he was just 28.

And Nelson is passionate about his volunteer work for his wife Jessie’s organization, H.E.R. Home, a 3/4ths home for women overcoming addiction.

Together with Jessie, the two share two children, daughter River and son Skyler, Yorkshire terrier Gary, and cats Little Bear, Henry, and Roy. The human members of the family are widely traveled; they’ve made it to every continent except Antarctica.

But they’re proud to call Erie home and for good reason; “I have always been very fond of Erie ... It was an incredible place to grow up and has helped shape my determined work ethic and values ... There’s a reason so many people return to Erie; it’s big enough to have options, yet small enough to feel familiar.” — CS

Todd Paropacic, 31
Visitor Services Coordinator, Erie Art Museum /
Musician / Artist

An artist in every sense of the word, Todd Paropacic does a little bit of everything. As a poet, a musician, a writer, an actor, and more, Erie is happy to have him as a welcome and engaging fixture helping to lead the new generation of our creative community.

Hailing from North East, Paropacic attended Gannon University, where he interned at the Erie Art Museum.

This paved the way for his full-time career as their visitor services coordinator. In that role, some of his duties include booking musical guests for Gallery Nights and Art After Dark, as well as writing press releases, exhibition panels, and pieces for the quarterly newsletter.

You may also know him as the frontman of PianoPunk, the one-of-a-kind trio that exists on a plane between Rufus Wainwright and the National, with a sense of humor. Beginning in February of 2022, the group has performed all over the area, even landing a set for 8 Great Tuesdays.



Paropacic also creates abstract portraits. These colorful and vibrant works were featured in a solo exhibition at the 10/20 Collective, and can be currently seen at City Gallery. Perhaps you yourself have contributed to one of his pieces. In "The Notebook," Paropacic and members of the public helped to fill 15 journals amounting to 2,500 pages, some of which were displayed during the 10/20 Collective show. He has been a member of the Northwest Pennsylvania Artist Association (NPAA) since 2022, and will begin his residency at FEED Media Art Center in the coming months.

He's published three collections of poetry: *Hackensack: or im only here cus new york city is like right there*, *History Now!*, and *The Crepe Crusade*, all of which feature his artwork on the covers.

These were published under his umbrella imprint What Why Aesthetics, which also includes his recording projects and more. In his own words, he wants "to help elevate art in the greater Erie community and find my place in the rich tapestry that is the Erie artistic tradition." — NW

Katie Phillips, 34

Career Specialist, Family Services of NWPA



In a country where many young people find themselves saddled with inordinate amounts of debt in order to attend college, Katie Phillips is determined to show

youths making the transition from foster placement to independent living that there are other, and oftentimes better, options. The career specialist and Edinboro University '15 grad, who works for Family Services of NWPA in conjunction with their Independent Living Program (ILP) "designs and implements internships and career pathways that offer alternatives to traditional university-led routes."

Many of these careers are in trades or medical and agricultural sectors, and they provide "practical and valuable experiences that prepare participants for successful careers," said Phillips.

One of her nominators spoke to Katie's rare gift of caring for others: "Katie is the poster woman for what all social workers should aspire to be," they said. "Every day Katie works to improve the lives of youth that would normally be ignored or neglected. Her work ensures every one of the Erie community's residents can live a fulfilling, productive, healthy, and vibrant life."

In addition to her professional work, Phillips is also a member of the North East School Board and sits on the board of the Office of Children and Youth Services. She is wife to husband Dustin and mother to daughter Willow, as well as pet mom to dog Odin and cat Captain Professor Soots In Boots.

In her free time she likes to study native plants, learn about invasive species, go camping, and spend time in the woods.

She plans on calling Erie home for a long while, saying, "Erie is a beautiful and vibrant community with abundant resources. My vision for Erie is a place where we collaborate to address complex community issues and find unique and innovative solutions, fostering a spirit of unity and progress. I believe that by strengthening networking among local nonprofits, we can enhance resource sharing and collectively amplify our impact." — CS

Philip Seaver-Hall, 28

Attorney, Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett

Philip Seaver-Hall is a rising star in the world of law — and we don't mean that figuratively. He has been given the distinction of "Rising Star" multiple times by Super Lawyers Magazine, a designation reserved for the top 2.5 percent of attorneys in each state who are under the age of 40 or who have been in practice for fewer than 10 years.

If you had told Philip 10 years ago he'd be where he is now, he likely wouldn't believe you. "I was laser-focused on becoming a professional classical musician between ages 14 and 20," he disclosed. "I wanted to play in a professional orchestra or teach music at the collegiate level."

And he certainly could have made a career of it: prior to law school, he performed countless concerts throughout Canada, Italy, and across the United States. "But then, halfway through my music degree, I started feeling like I could do more to make a long-lasting difference in people's lives — I felt that law presented a higher calling for me."

After earning his JD from Penn State University's Dickinson School of Law, Philip found himself in Erie for a summer internship with Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett (KMGS), where he now works. Born and raised

in Gilbert, Arizona and attending high school in Sarasota, Florida, Erie is now home for Philip: "I immediately loved Erie, and now I can't imagine living anywhere else."

In his work with Constitutional Law at KMGS, Philip is also routinely called upon to advise school districts throughout Pennsylvania on complicated civil rights issues, including freedom of speech, freedom of religion, LGBTQIA+ rights, and student privacy. In January of 2025, Philip will also be joining the faculty of Penn State University's Dickinson School of Law as an adjunct professor of law teaching advanced legal writing.



Philip's community involvement reaches beyond his practice of law: he was recently elected chairman of the Erie Philharmonic Board of Governors, serves as a board member for Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park (LEAF), is president of the Erie County Young Democrats, and is a contributing editor for the Appellate Advocacy Blog. In 2023, he received the Pro Bono Award from both the Erie County Bar Association and the Pennsylvania Bar Association.

"My highest ambition is to serve the public," he said. "I do my best every day to serve my clients expertly, efficiently, ethically, and empathetically. And as a political activist, I work every day to foster our democracy, help Erie County's residents make their voices heard, and build a better world." — AK

Haieda Sharifi, 22

Social Worker/Case Manager, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)



Haieda Sharifi believes in four values: loyalty, integrity, hard work, and constituency. It's those virtues that have defined her life since 2022 when her family escaped the Taliban, who seized her hometown of Kabul, Afghanistan.

Haieda spent five months at a military base in Texas before resettling in Erie, where she has since dedicated

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ATTORNEY SETH TROTT

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Attorney Trott is a member of the Litigation Division whose practice focuses on civil and commercial litigation, business law, and municipal matters. He received his Bachelor of Science, Business and Advertising degree in 2015, Bachelor of Business Administration, Finance degree in 2016, both from Gannon University. He received his Juris Doctor from The Pennsylvania State University, Dickinson Law School in 2023, where he served as Editor-in-Chief of the Dickinson Law Review.

Prior to his career in law, Attorney Trott formed an energy technology start-up and held a fellowship with a regional think tank. He frequently speaks and writes on topics pertaining to emerging technologies, economic development, and poverty. Outside of his practice he volunteers his time to assist with various community and economic development efforts, as well as regional civic and political affairs.

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her time to helping over 500 fellow Afghans start their new lives in the area.

She became an interpreter at the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) because she was one of the first Afghan women there who spoke English. She climbed the ladder quickly, from on-call to part-time, then a full-time case worker, helping dozens of families who had been allies to the U.S. military in Afghanistan as they prepared legal applications for asylum in the States.

She is now a case manager for the federally-funded program Services for Afghan Survivors Impacted by Combat, which supports families with services like enrolling children in school, coordinating housing and employment, signing people up for driving lessons, and more.

In Afghan culture, women's rights are largely restricted, so sometimes Afghan women don't feel comfortable speaking to men when they arrive in the U.S.

"Since coming to Erie, I have dedicated myself to helping immigrants from Afghanistan and other countries adjust to life here," she said. "I act as a bridge for them, providing support with language and cultural integration, especially for women who feel comfortable sharing their concerns with me."

She was two years into a law program in Kabul when her family escaped, and is now taking prerequisite courses for Gannon University's nursing program. Haieda plans to receive dual degrees in business administration and nursing, with future hopes of applying to medical school.

"For as young as she is (22), Haieda Sharifi is an utterly crucial figure in Erie, helping some of the region's most vulnerable families to remain stable through their resettlement period in Erie — a time that is temporary but fragile," wrote Ashley Lawson, director of the USCRI Erie field office. "Generations into the future, there will be thousands of people who can point back to Haieda Sharifi as the key figure who put their family on a steady path to self-sufficiency and community integration." — CF

Shabia Singh, 33

Family Medicine Physician, Chief Medical Officer at MHEDS



Born in Zambia, Shabia Singh moved to Toronto at age 10, where she attended high school at West Humber Collegiate Institute. She was a certified lifeguard, played bass guitar in a band, and worked hard in school. After graduating, she earned her Doctorate of Medicine from Avalon University School of Medicine in

Curaçao where she received proficiency awards as a top student in anatomy, histology, pathology, and pharmacology. She then completed her residency training at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

Today, she is a family medicine physician as well as being the chief medical officer at Erie's Multicultural Health Evaluation Delivery System (MHEDS), an all-purpose healthcare service provider for Erie's vast multicultural community. As highlighted by those who know her, she works tirelessly to help Erie's New Americans navigate their communities and by providing healthcare delivery that is both effective and inclusive.

"My best professional achievement is providing care to the population of northwest PA, predominantly the underserved community, and seeing positive transformations of those under my care," Singh says. "I aspire to deliver high level healthcare services to the Erie community and I hope to continuously motivate and inspire positive health outcomes."

She's working to add additional healthcare services needed within the community including dental, pharmaceutical, mental health, and urgent care. As lead on their quality improvement plan, she's also worked hard finding ways to be involved in community programs for patient engagement. She's also working on earning a lifestyle medicine certification and is excited to incorporate what she learns into her practice to heal and treat some of the root causes of chronic conditions. As one colleague notes, she is "a unique talent and a visionary striving to change health outcomes across Erie County for new residents to the community."

In her spare time, she enjoys hiking at national parks, biking, running, traveling, cooking homemade vegetarian meals, and spending time with family and friends. She's also a proud first-time homeowner in Erie.

"Erie has so much to offer," says Singh. "I am optimistic in its growth and potential and I am proud to be part of the Erie community." — JB

Jason Spangenberg, 32

Borough Manager, Borough of Edinboro

As the manager for the Borough of Edinboro, Jason Spangenberg knows what makes his town tick. From handling all of the borough's accounting and finances to managing the day-to-day operations — including water, sewer, streets, police, zoning, and recreation — there's not much that goes on in the town that he doesn't have a hand in.

But borough management wasn't always on his career radar: "I actually never planned to work in local government," Jason confessed. "I went to school for accounting and was planning to go to grad school to get enough credits to take the CPA exam, when a part-time office clerk position opened up at the borough right before my college graduation. I applied, and now it's been over 10 years!"

Growing up in McKean, Jason earned his degree in business administration and accounting from Edinboro University before making his way up the ranks in the borough's offices. From part-time utility bill clerk, he moved into the finance director position in 2016 before taking on the role of borough manager in 2021.

Although this field was not the direction he planned to take, he does feel that it happened in large part due

to inspiration from his late grandfather, Neil Williams. "He was always doing his part for his community," Jason said. "I had the best example in the world in my grandfather, and I only hope I can serve his memory as he deserved."



In his tenure as borough manager, one of Jason's proudest accomplishments has been improving the relationship between the borough and the community, the university, and the township. "I think the poor relationships were just from strong opinions and bad blood, and people were feeding into that rather than doing the right thing," he said. "I was working [to fix those relationships] from the moment I started working here."

And fix them he did: in the few years since taking on leadership, Jason has brought in more than \$3 million in grants for the borough, directly impacting and improving the community. "The parks and recreation grants are the most rewarding, since they have a direct impact on the community's enjoyment of what we have to offer."

Jason is also a board member for Edinboro Community & Economic Development (ECED), which organizes large community events, including the annual Boro With The Works firework festival.

When not directly improving his community through his work, Jason's talent as a trombonist is put to work, playing in the pit orchestra for musicals. "I especially enjoy playing for the Erie Footlights summer theater program," he said. A member of the Misery Bay Big Band and a volunteer staff member for the General McLane marching band, Jason also organizes a community jazz band alongside his wife Katie and his brother Corey.

Outside of work and community involvement, you'll still find Jason out in the community; he enjoys spending his weekends helping in the kitchen of his wife Katie's new coffee shop in Edinboro, Bean & Bear Café. — AK

Alex (Ionesav) Staley, 24

Artist, FEED Media Art Center / Teaching Artist / DJ, Kings Rook Club / Co-Owner, STIM CITY COLLECTIVE

When it comes to the creative arts, Alex (Ionesav) Staley isn't afraid to try new things. Whether it is acting in a play, designing clothing, digital art, film making, teaching, or making or playing music — he is known for being involved.

Born and raised on Erie's east side, Staley attended Mercyhurst Prep, Bayfront Maritime Center, East High, and Strong Vincent. He joined the Erie Arts and Culture teaching artist roster and completed his first residency at Edison Elementary School, his former grade school. In this program, Staley guided the students through

the process of shoe design, allowing them to create art that was printed on high quality footwear which they all received at the end of the program. Giving back and being a mentor is important to Staley who says, "I wouldn't have made it to the point I'm at right now without mentors who have really guided me through life. Mentorship doesn't seem to be very common these days but it's extremely effective and enriching. I would like to encourage others to give back to our community in ways of mentorship if they are able to."



Staley says he is most proud that he was recently awarded an \$87,000 grant from the Simons Foundation in NYC to create a large-scale art show at FEED inspired by the eclipse. He was the only Erie artist working with FEED and Erie Arts and Culture on the Triangle Project which celebrated the Solar Eclipse this spring. Staley traveled to New York to work with scientists to then present their work at FEED, and the project is receiving worldwide attention.

Staley has also shown his art in Miami during Miami Art Week 2022. He is involved with the Erie School District, PACA, Erie Playhouse, and works as a DJ at the Kings Rook Club. You may have also seen him performing with one of his bands. Staley is a vocalist for SAN-IS, as well as a bass player for Dirty Leaf and Matthew Crays and Co. In his free time, he is known for being really good at *Dance, Dance, Revolution*.

Staley says he wants to continue to support the arts and the culture that exists in Erie while working towards helping others reach their full potential. — AVS

Tenay Taylor, 35
Founder and Chief Positivity Officer,
Pretty Security LLC



Tenay Taylor was looking out for Erie long before she established its first Black woman-owned security firm. Over the years, her nurturing spirit has manifested in her direct care work at Sarah Reed Children's Center,

where she helped transform the lives of kids and families; as an AmeriCorps VISTA member, through which she has teamed with local nonprofit organizations to fight poverty; as program coordinator with Erie's Black Wall Street, where she's equipped her fellow Black entrepreneurs with actionable business insights and strategies; and as an Erie City Mom supporting other mothers and mother figures.

"I've known [Tenay] for two decades and she has a true passion for life," says nominator and former Collegiate Academy classmate Susannah Faulkner (40 Under 40 class of 2023). "She fights for what she believes in and has the strength to build a better Erie."

The cornerstones of that better Erie, according to Taylor, will be cemented in knowledge and education. "[I'd like to promote] the idea that intelligence is not only valuable but also admirable. I strive to make it 'cool' to be smart." It's little surprise that Taylor's favorite pastime is learning, which has led to a diverse set of interests that include logistics (she holds a Class A CDL), activism, sports, beauty, and fashion.

Whether you're managing security, forecasting finances, or driving a truck, it's important to monitor for blind spots — and cover them. Especially where there is accountability to others — something this aspiring Erie City Councilwoman feels deeply.

"I am committed to enhancing Erie's overall quality of life, aspiring to elevate its status as a highly desirable locale for residents. My vision includes fostering an environment conducive to establishing enduring family legacies, where individuals can flourish and thrive within the fabric of our hometown. By cultivating a sense of security and prosperity, I aim to lay the foundation for future generations to call Erie their cherished home." — MS

Jenny Tompkins, 28
Clean Water Campaign Manager, PennFuture



A convener and connector for many local groups, educating and empowering them to make sure Erie is not left behind when decisions are made in Harrisburg and Washington, D.C., Tompkins is leading PennFuture's efforts to build climate-resilient waterways and watershed communities in Pennsylvania.

Similar to a point guard or floor general in basketball, Tompkins directs the necessary resources to leverage the organization's civic engagement, policy, legislative, communications, and legal expertise, making sure all teammates are running the same play. As a key liaison to her home in the Northwest Region, Tompkins also continues to oversee PennFuture's Lake Erie and Great Lakes Advocacy. She remains embedded in the Erie community to build climate resilience, protect wa-

ter quality, and watchdog against other environmental threats. You may find her providing public comment at a meeting, lobbying elected officials, or meeting with like-minded advocates on an issue of concern.

Hailing from Romulus, New York, Tompkins attended Romulus Central School and Allegheny College where she received her BA in Environmental Studies. She has become involved with numerous agencies and serves on the Center for Family Services Board of Directors as secretary and governance committee chair. She is also a member of the City of Meadville Environmental Advisory Council; an election rover with Crawford County Voter Service; a Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy alum; and chair of Community Resilience Action Network of Erie.

Tompkins hopes her advocacy motivates others to take action to protect Lake Erie and expand access to it for others. "As a Great Lakes community, a sustainable Erie hinges on clean water and better health outcomes for our watershed communities," she said.

As you'd expect, Tompkins loves to be near the water as much as possible. She enjoys kayaking and canoeing, a walk or hike with her husband and two rescue pups (Chai & Finn), in her vegetable or pollinator gardens, or with her nose in a good book. Her husband Bennett also loves working regionally with the Foundation for Sustainable Forests. "As a couple, we're working on protecting both our woods and waters," she said. — AVS

Seth Trott, 31
Attorney, Quinn Law Firm



Advocacy is said to be compassion and community at work. Case in point: Seth Trott. The Erie native and attorney in Quinn Law Firm's litigation division uses his talents to shine a light on the needed justice for others. Trott fosters political engagement at the local level and supports marginalized members of the community. He has assisted over 20 transgender individuals by developing "Hello My Name Is: A Legal Name Change Clinic" and co-hosted the SafeNet fundraiser this past year, an event that supports survivors of domestic violence.

His efforts reach across the entirety of Erie County as he is involved with Young Erie Professionals (YEP) and is board treasurer for Impact Corry. He assists rural and urban communities in finding funds for infrastructure projects, and he researches the implications that emerging technology, poverty, and green initiatives will continue to have for years to come.

"Many people want to support positive change, but Seth actually gets out there and does it," said nominator Charles Gray, executive director of Impact Corry.

Seth was recently awarded "Ally of the Year" by Comp-



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KNOX LAW WELCOMES MASON D. BRACKEN



Mason D. Bracken has joined Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett, P.C.

Mason focuses his practice on complex litigation. In cases before federal and state courts and administrative agencies, he represents clients in various fields, including municipalities, school districts, businesses, nonprofits, and individuals. He has significant experience in multiple areas of

law including employment law, civil rights, and constitutional law as well as construction, contract, and real estate disputes.

Mason is licensed in both Pennsylvania and Missouri and has experience as a law clerk in federal court. He earned his J.D. at Washington University School of Law, graduating cum laude. He received his B.A. magna cum laude from Truman State University, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

He lives in Erie and joins a team of 40 attorneys that has been providing quality legal services to businesses, families, public entities, and nonprofit organizations for over 65 years.



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ton's Table for 2024 and completed the Jefferson Educational Society's Raimy Fellowship program in 2019. He was the editor-in-chief of the Dickinson Law Review while in law school at Penn State in 2023.

He returned to Erie to begin his family, a big part of his life outside the office. He has two stepdaughters, Zoey and Josephine, and a 7-month-old son, Emerson. Seth also enjoys restoring antique furniture.

"In everything I do, I look for ways to build bridges and make a genuine impact throughout the broader Erie community. We live in a place where you don't necessarily need to be the head of a large company or organization to make a difference," Seth said. "As Erie continues to reinvent itself, I look forward to seeing more and more people take ownership of their community to turn the Erie region into the polished gem it deserves to be." — CF

Drew Whiting, 38

CEO, Erie Downtown Development Corporation / Owner, 1000 State and Five Iron Golf Erie



With arms wide open, this Clarence, New York native is embracing Erie's ongoing transformation. Since relocating from Chicago in 2021, Drew Whiting has made "leaving it all on the field for Erie" his personal creed (as opposed to leaving it all on the karaoke stage while channeling his inner Scott Stapp).

The Notre Dame and Loyola University of Chicago School of Law grad has wasted little time applying his expertise as a venture capital attorney and entrepreneur to his role as the new CEO of the Erie Downtown Development Corporation (EDDC), replacing John Persinger. With most of the EDDC's initial projects completed or rounding into form, Whiting has turned his attention to collaboration with peer organizations such as the Erie Downtown Partnership, cultivating yet more reasons to live, work, and play in the heart of our city.

The largest and most personal of those investments is 1000 State St., which has become the latest example of a once-neglected downtown property injected with new life. The corner of 10th and State now houses Five Iron Golf, an indoor social entertainment complex featuring six state-of-the-art sports simulators (five golf and one multi-sport) as well as lower-tech but also enjoyable diversions such as darts, shuffleboard, and air hockey.

Previously, these complexes had only existed in major cities like New York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago, but Whiting and his partners (general manager Chase Ro-

gan and kitchen manager J.B. Innes) were able to pitch a pretty convincing argument that Erie is a city on the upswing, and the team was awarded the franchise. Tying his personal fortunes to the project was a risk, of course, but aligns perfectly with his ethos.

"I want to serve the community as a leader by example, putting others first and doing difficult things with conviction and optimism."

We're lucky his Erie in-laws are known for their longevity, because we have to believe there are more great things to come from this golf enthusiast, live music lover, amateur hockey coach, and father of twins (Annie and Augie). — MS

Ja'Leesa Williams, 35

Embroidery Specialist, Sew Royalty / Teaching Artist



Embroidery is a skill that requires infinite patience, minute attention to detail, and a willingness to see a project through from start to finish. It shouldn't surprise you to learn that Ja'Leesa Williams also embodies these values, and the owner and embroidery specialist for Sew Royalty also has a deep and abiding commitment to the Erie community.

"I'm committed to investing my time and resources in empowering individuals and my community," said Williams. "Time, like financial resources, is a valuable asset. Which is why I make sure to spend time giving back in some capacity."

She continued, "Rather than simply selling products, I focus on sharing knowledge and skills, like teaching people to create their own items."

The Central High and Perseus House Charter School of Excellence grad, who holds a degree in social work from Mercyhurst University, is also on the Sisters of St. Joseph Advancement Committee, as well as the board of the Youth Leadership Institute of Erie. She's a teaching artist and member of the National Society of Leadership and Success as well.

Williams' nominator spoke to her unique ability to combine social work and art: "Her current involvement in teaching sewing and embroidery in schools and community centers ... underscores her passion for arts education and leadership in cultural enrichment. This nominee's blend of professional expertise in social work, leadership acumen, and active participation in arts and community development, embodies the spirit and criteria of 40 Under 40."

When asked about staying in Erie for the foreseeable future Williams was adamant, "Erie is home," she said. "I want to be of service to my community before relocating somewhere else. My mission here isn't complete yet." — CS

Tori Williams, 28

Assistant Director of Campus Engagement and Activities, Gannon University



To know Tori Williams is to be inspired by her — through her leadership and work at Gannon where she plans and runs their entire events and programming schedule, managing over 80 student programs, activities, or developmental retreats, being the point of contact for over 100 student clubs and organizations, running the Student Development Theory Cohort, leading three international travel trips with Gannon students (to Iceland, Australia, and South Africa), and training 120+ employees in Gannon's recently adopted Safe Zones Project (which aims to "foster inclusive environments, understand LGBTQIA+ identities, explore allyship, and address common challenges faced by this community within educational settings"). And that single sentence is just scratching the surface of the breadth of her meaningful community work.

For Tori, it was her participation within the Safe Zones Project that has been the most meaningful to her, "Co-hosting Safe Zone Trainings on Gannon's campus has been one of the most enriching experiences of my professional career. If the visibility of seeing over 120 Safe Zone Trained stickers across campus (both in Erie and in Ruskin, Florida) makes even one person feel safer, we've done our job."

This John Carroll University alum came to Erie by way of Lawrence, Kansas where she earned her Masters of Education in Higher Education Administration. But Erie is now the place she is proud to call home, "I believe in the power of small actions to create significant change in our community. I am dedicated to making Erie a place where everyone feels valued and supported."

When she's not busy chipping away at the mountain of work on her desk, you can find her volunteering with local neighborhood organization Our West Bayfront, spending time with her partner Starla and their cat Dolly Purrton, participating in her Queer Book Club, or simply being outdoors with friends.

She's also made it a personal mission to try to inspire joy wherever she goes. If you see Tori, she'll invariably ask you, "What has been bringing you joy lately?" She elaborates, "This simple question has sparked some of the most meaningful conversations I've ever had. By encouraging others to discuss joy, I try to remind everyone to appreciate the small moments that bring happiness." — EP

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EVENTS

Exploring the Human Condition in *Closer Than Ever*

Local theater veteran returns to Erie to direct musical

PREMIERES FRIDAY, JUL. 12

Craig Schneider has directed 14 shows in the Erie area and he doesn't plan to let a little distance keep him from directing again. Schneider, who now lives in Arizona, returns to Erie frequently to visit his mother. This month, he will be returning to the PACA stage to direct Maltby and Shire's *Closer Than Ever: A Musical Revue*.

This show was originally planned to be staged in April of 2020 but had to be shelved due to the pandemic. This is an entirely sung production and has no spoken dialogue. Schneider (who selected this show with PACA board approval) says "after directing *Sex With Strangers*, I wanted to do a 180 turn with a musical rather than a stage show."

The cast of 16 includes well-known stage singing favorites Sherree Beltz, Joe Greulich, Diane Hardner, Richard Kress, and Patrick Vahey Jr. But, Schneider points out, "this musical cabaret

also includes the equally accomplished but maybe lesser known Erie voices of Carla Arnone, Riley Arthur Droney, Alexandria Coles, Holly Kress, Lydia Marks, Camellia Tatara, and Teal Weatherley, among others. You could listen to any of them sing the phone book."

The musical score has no click tracks and will be performed live onstage by Nicholas Nasibyan on electric piano and Dan Lucore on electric and acoustic bass.

Closer Than Ever has a total of 22 songs. Schneider describes each song as "a one-act of the varied experiences we have once we've lived a little." Mercyhurst Music School graduate and professional actor-singer Patrick Philip Becker is also returning to Erie for this show. Schneider adds, "He has a very touching song about fathers ('If I Sing'), and his father will likely be in the audience. Bring a Kleenex for that song." — Edwina Capozziello



***Closer Than Ever*, in production this month at PACA, is entirely sung – there is no spoken dialogue whatsoever and it is performed to a score performed totally live, by in-house musicians. A slice of life presented through music. *Closer Than Ever's* cast promises to deliver an emotional punch.**

July 12 and 13 at 7:30 p.m., July 14 at 2 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$20 // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com

Exploring the Ingredients of Erie's Diversity

Ethnic Market Tours provide a unique and diverse cultural experience

CONTINUING SATURDAY, JULY 13

This summer, Erie Arts and Culture's Ethnic Market Tours are providing a guided experience of the city's diverse New American businesses. Three of the tours will occur in July and August. The businesses on the tour represent countries like Iraq, Syria, Nepal, Bhutan, Azerbaijan, and more.

Erie Arts and Culture's Folklorist-in-Residence Kelly Armour lives on the east side of Erie and has witnessed these markets emerge over the years around her neighborhood. "They're just really exciting for me to see. These storefronts that have been empty have been activated with just incredible culture," Armour said.

Wujdan "Wuji" Ahmad will be spearheading the tours. During the tour, she leads the group around to the various storefronts and ends the tour with a meal at a New American restaurant.

Ahmad is a New American herself from Eritrea, raised in Baghdad, Iraq. She has called Erie her home since 2001 and has often frequented the businesses included in the tour. "My family and I also like to shop at these places because they have spices and things that you wouldn't find in big retail stores," Ahmad said.



Erie Arts and Culture's Folklorist-in-Residence Kelly Armour has collaborated with Wujdan "Wuji" Ahmad (pictured) to lead a series of Ethnic Market Tours throughout the City of Erie.

Armour explains that these businesses support and preserve culture in the refugee and New American communities in Erie, "If you talk to the market owners, they will all say, 'Oh, but we're more than a market, we're also a community hub.'"

The markets provide a diverse cultural experience for those outside of the communities represented as well. "(The market owners) are open to talking about their culture and their history and everything. I believe the tours are a really great way to see the diversity available in Erie," Ahmad said.

Ahmad encourages those on the tour to be open-minded and to ask ques-

tions: "A lot of these store owners are very knowledgeable on what's on their shelves and they're open to giving you advice and recipes."

The tour participants should also be prepared to shop, Ahmad said with a chuckle. "You will find a lot of things that you'll love. You'll find a lot of things that are not available elsewhere locally. You'll find stuff that you usually go to out of town for or shop online for. You'll find interesting things." — Alana Sabol

July 13, 10 a.m. to noon, July 20, 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., and August 3, 10 a.m. to noon // \$30 per person // For tickets and information visit: erieartsandculture.givevirtuous.org

Shakespeare Summer Nights Celebrates 20 Years with *Twelfth Night*

Comedy lightheartedly explores heavy themes

BEGINNING SUNDAY, JUL. 14

The Schuster Theater at Gannon University is celebrating 20 years of Shakespeare Summer Nights with their production of *Twelfth Night*, directed by Jordan Wolfe, a longtime veteran of Shakespearean theater. As usual, the magic will unfurl at the Lake Erie at Frontier Park Amphitheater, an intimate venue ripe for audience interaction.

The play follows the ploys of numerous suitors as they court the Countess Olivia, who ironically falls in love with Viola, a female messenger disguised as a male page. Chaos, of course, ensues.

"*Twelfth Night* is one of my favorites; it's very funny. I knew we had some strong actors in town who could make it sing," explains Wolfe. "It looks at loss and death in a way more telling than we as a society look at it. We tend to make humor out of it. In our darkest moments, society finds a way to make people smile when they're at their lowest. That's what this show does. It looks at humanity in a way that every choice made onstage forces somebody else's action."

Every production brings a unique spin to Shakespeare's settings, from the period piece of the 1996 BBC film adaptation to the contemporary setting for the National Theater's 2017 production starring Tamsin Grieg. Wolfe set this outdoor production in the 1920s, putting a jazzy twist on the classic story.

Every actor, too, brings something different to its signature roles. Hannah Richardson, who is playing the character of Lady Olivia in her Shakespearean debut, was particularly inspired by the 2009 production of *Twelfth Night* from *Shakespeare in the Park*.

"It's so nuanced and reminds me of *Yentl* with Barbara Streisand. A woman is disguised as a man and forges a relationship with another woman. I think it unpacks so much and shows the delicate relationship between Viola and Olivia. There's such an openness to the play and a willingness to take risks. It's like a childlike curiosity. It's really good that we can act on our impulses, take what is written, and make that manifest."

"Shakespeare is to theater as ballet is to

dance and piano is to music," Jasse Camacho Vera (40 Under 40 class of 2023), who plays Sir Toby, describes eloquently. He previously played Duke Orsino in the 2020 production and was inspired by Luke Weyand's depiction of Toby from that production. "The laughter that [Sir Toby] is conveying to everyone is a mask to cover what he's actually going through. Drinking is his coping mechanism to get through the loss of his family."

Vera reflects on how relatable Sir Toby is to people, comparing him to comedians like Robin Williams. "He reflects many of the people we know today who are struggling who mask the pain behind humor. Some of the most impactful, comedic, lighthearted people do that because it's their shield. When playing Sir Toby, I am not only looking for the meaning of the Shakespearean dialogue, but I'm looking for the reason he is saying it beyond that. He's a very layered and relatable character."

Wolfe has a final message for audiences as excitement and anticipation grow with each rehearsal: "It is going to be a riot."



For three nights in July, Frontier Park will transform into the Globe Theatre as Gannon University's Schuster Theater program performs *Twelfth Night* in the amphitheater.

Actors have been making bold choices since day one. They are large, loud, and big. Their story is universal, and it is a solid cast that is having fun. When actors have fun in the process of rehearsing the show, it will be a production worth seeing." — Thomas Taylor

July 14 through July 17 // LEAF, 1501 W. 6th St. // Free // For more information: facebook.com/gannonschustertheatre

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 Lydia Marika – Nicholas Nasibyan – Camellia Tatara
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EVENTS

More 429 Alley Parties to Be Held This Summer

Discover local music, food, and more at this downtown summer series

CONTINUING FRIDAY, JUL. 19

Introducing 429 Alley Parties, the newest summer event bringing a vibrant and unique urban experience to Downtown Erie. This innovative series, a collaborative effort between Glass Growers Gallery, The Dollhouse at Pointe Fouré Vintage Boutique, and the Erie Downtown Development Corporation (EDDC), promises a sonic season filled with local live music, delicious food, and handcrafted cocktails.

According to EDDC organizer and current 40 Under 40 honoree Ryan Hoover, the idea for these alley parties was conceived as a way to creatively engage the public in underutilized Erie spaces. The inaugural event, held on the eve of the eclipse, featured beer from Erie Ale Works, food from IPPA Pizza, and music by Jess Royer (40 Under 40 class of 2017) and Nick Warren. That evening was such a success that the organizers decided to host several more throughout the summer.

"As far as music is concerned, we've got a great lineup of jazz, indie rock, and even folk jam bands. Overall, expect the music to be vibey and re-

laxed," says Hoover. The upcoming July alley party will feature music from Fred Oakman (40 Under 40 class of 2020). It's worth noting that entry to the 429 Alley Parties is completely free, with food and drinks available for purchase.

Food and cocktails are a highlight, with existing Flagship City District businesses setting up satellite locations to serve attendees. Each event will feature Luminary Distillery Cocktails and one of the Food Hall kitchens, promising a variety of delectable options.

The goal of the alley parties is to add an extra layer of activity to Downtown Erie, encouraging guests to stroll around and explore.

"Whenever we get the chance to add an alley party to existing activities, we'll do it. We've added the alley party to the last car show, kickball league nights, and we're even adding an alley party to CelebrateErie," adds Hoover. — Aaron Mook

6 to 8 p.m. // 429 State St. Alleyway // Free // For more information: flagshipcitydistrict.com



The urban copse between the buildings on Fifth and State will be transformed throughout the summer into a bespoke stage – offering smaller musical acts (such as Jess Royer, pictured here) an intimate spot for performance. July's 429 Alley Party will feature the folk-punk tunes of Fred Oakman.

Big Art Day at Grounded Print Shop During Summer Maker Market

Help create an 'exquisite corpse' while supporting ECAT programs

SATURDAY, JUL. 20

Grounded Print and Paper Shop is set to host a new art market, the Maker Market, on three select summer dates including Saturday, July 20.

The Maker Market promises to be a hub for local artists, artisans, and creatives, offering a unique platform to showcase and sell their handmade creations.

The shop kicked off the summer with the first Maker Market on June 22. According to shop owner and creator Ashely Pastore (Erie's 40 Under 40 class of 2022), the July market has the highest number of vendors registered.

Inspired by her experiences in Austin, Texas, Pastore returned to Erie with a vision to create an accessible art space for the community. This vision led her to establish Grounded in 2018, an interdisciplinary printmaking, papermaking, and artist residency space, aiming to foster the same sense of artistic community she cherished in Texas.

"When I moved back here, I felt like the thing missing was the support of creative thinking," Pastore explained. "I

want to be a person that supports creativity. I don't think words can really describe how important arts are."

The Maker Markets feature various products including artwork, jewelry, textiles, ceramics, and more. Local food vendors and regional musicians will also be on site at the market. Grounded is hosting several art workshops and demonstrations including a community exquisite corpse project where participants create individual carved blocks that will be combined.

"For our July market, we have a Big Art Day event in partnership with the Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT)," Pastore said. "We're doing exquisite corpses, where one person makes a head, one person makes a torso, one person makes the feet, and they all get put together in one weird creation. We're calling it Mashing Monsters." The final, large-scale art will be printed using an actual steam roller to press the image.

Community members can come to Grounded Printshop to create their own carved block that will be printed and



Be a part of something big – create your own carved block print to be included with others into a massive collaborative art project during Grounded Print Shop's July Maker's Market. Proceeds from the sale of prints made during the event will benefit ECAT's Teen Art Club.

available for sale at the market. The proceeds from the Mashing Monsters project will benefit ECAT's Teen Art Club.

The Maker Market will be set up outdoors in the shop's parking lot and garden space. Grounded will also be open for operation during the market. — Julia Carden

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. // Grounded Print and Paper Shop, 1902 Cherry St. // Free // For more info: groundprintshop.com

Gem City Rock & Mineral Society's
55th Annual
Gem & Mineral Show & Sale
July 20 & 21, 2024
Zem Zem Shriners Banquet and Conference Center
2525 West 38th Street, Erie, PA
(Corner of West 38th & Zuck Road)

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Tommy Stinson of The Replacements and Friends at Lavery's Bunker

A one-man mutiny
SATURDAY, JUL. 20

There will be a "One Man Mutiny" at the Bunker behind Lavery Brewing Company as singer-songwriter and bassist Tommy Stinson brings an intimate solo performance to one of Erie's most-loved breweries. Stinson has been a part of rock'n'roll history through his work as a bassist for the Replacements, Guns N' Roses, and Soul Asylum, along with working with the bands Perfect and Bash & Pop. He is fresh off the release of his third solo record *Wronger*, which he released with Pennsylvania guitarist Chip Roberts, under his country project moniker Cowboys in the Campfire — the style is in the same vein as the Old 97s, The Knitters, and Golden Smog.



Catch a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see a legendary musician at an intimate venue in Erie when Tommy Stinson (formerly of The Replacements, Guns N' Roses, and Soul Asylum) performs at Lavery Brewing Company's Bunker.

Stinson has been a part of rock'n'roll history through his work as a bassist for the Replacements, Guns N' Roses, and Soul Asylum, along with working with the bands Perfect and Bash & Pop.

Stinson has been traveling for the past year, playing intimate shows in backyards and breweries, and his continuing

trek brings him through Erie. The show is being billed as a performance with his friends, who are members of Central Pennsylvania's Ma'aM, a country-blue-grass band that will be opening the evening. This is an unmissable chance to see a Rock & Roll Hall of Fame nominee and legendary rock musician play at a smaller venue, right in our hometown. —Larry Wheaton

7 to 10 p.m. // Lavery Brewing Bunker, 128 W. 12th St. (rear) // \$25 General Admission, \$40 "Extra Love," or \$100 "Hang with Tommy" // For tickets and info: eventbrite.com

Meals, Mysteries, and Murder

The *Victorian Princess* hosts their third murder mystery cruise

BEGINNING THURSDAY, JUL. 25

A night of fine dining, mystery, and murder awaits. Thrown into the midst of secret agents, hired hitmen and rogue assassins, who is safe? Who is lying? And most importantly, whodunit?

Following the success of previous productions *Murder on Misery Bay* and *Murder in a Bottle*, writer and director Adele Crotty is excited to bring her murder mystery comedy, *Murder: Impossible*, onto the *Victorian Princess*.

Crotty, Best of Erie 2023 Best Local Actress winner, recounted her luck and experience bringing the performance to life: "I worked with the owner of the ship, Duryea Gette, on a show many years ago. After looking at the logistics of doing a show on a boat, we decided on a murder mystery. It's been one of the best decisions I've ever made."

"I've always loved writing and theater, so when my partner at the time encouraged me to go for it, I figured why not," she continued. "This has been such a unique and wonderful experience. I can't imagine not doing it."

Most of *Murder: Impossible's* cast has been with Crotty from the start, such as Colleen Munn, Katie States, Tony Lewandowski, and Lisa Simonian. She is honored to welcome Ken Falkenhagen and Chad Santos to her team: "It's so exciting to watch everyone's faces at the first read through as they get a taste for who they will become. These are folks whose talents are unmatched."



Murder, mystery, intrigue, and delicious food all combine on board the *Victorian Princess* for a night of thrilling fun. Join Adele Crotty and the cast of *Murder: Impossible* in a unique production-at-sea, all catered by Calamari's Squid Row.

Dinner will be catered by Calamari's Squid Row.

Although the dinner cruise is not interactive during performance sections, Crotty encourages the audience to pay close attention and listen for important clues: "This will help you pin down who the culprit is, especially if you want to win the prize at the end of the show."

Due to language and violence present in the production, parental discretion is advised. — Cassandra Gripp

Thursdays, Jul. 25 through Aug. 29 // 6 p.m. // *Victorian Princess* Cruise Line, 1 State St. // \$65 // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com



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EVENTS

We've Got Good Newsies

Disney's *Newsies* hits the Erie Playhouse stage

PREMIERS FRIDAY, JUL. 26

Extra, extra! Read all about it! The latest production to hit the LECOM Stage at the Erie Playhouse is Disney's *Newsies*, the musical inspired by the real-life Newsboys Strike of 1899 in New York City, and it is a production you won't want to miss.

Newsies follows a group of orphaned and homeless newsboys living in Lower Manhattan as they struggle to make ends meet. When costs for the boys rise on the papers they sell, their informal leader Jack Kelly declares the newsies to be a union, organizing a protest that turns into a strike against the unfair hike in cost. What follows is their fight for fairness in their profession against the big newspaper tycoons, leading to monumental support across the city and highlighting the changes that can occur when one fights for a cause they believe in.

Although true to the original script, the production will still have its unique features: "As with any show, the actors bring the characters to life with their own take on the roles," director Ryan Ingram said. "We are making an effort to maintain the essence of the Disney film and hit Broadway show, but our production is very much our own with original choreography by Leah Johnson and Heidi Sheehan."

For many directors, a cast composed of many new faces can be a daunting challenge, but it is one Ingram feels can be an advantage. "We have a whopping 15 cast members making their mainstage debut [in *Newsies*], which has brought an intensity to rehearsals," he said. "They are coming ready to work (even in the heat) and proving that they all deserve to be here. This has sparked the Playhouse 'regulars' to step it up as well."

One of the most rewarding aspects for Ingram is seeing each of the actor's grow into their roles, no matter the part. "Seeing the confidence rise in the newer performers has been incredible to watch," he said. "As the show is coming together, everyone is dropping any inhibitions and the excitement is growing about how all the pieces are falling into place."

With moving solos, an ensemble that works beautifully together, and choreography that is exciting and energetic, *Newsies* is set to be a highlight of the Playhouse's season. "It is truly a show that should not be missed," said Ingram. — Ally Kutz

Fridays and Saturdays, Jul. 26 through Aug. 9 at 7:30 p.m. // Thursday, Aug. 8 at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays, Aug. 4 and 11 at 2 p.m. // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. // \$19-\$30 // For tickets and info: erieplayhouse.org



Did you hear the scoop? *Newsies: The Broadway Musical* is coming to the Erie Playhouse. Join Anthony Nunez as Jack Kelly (left) and Peyton Thiem as Katherine Plumber as they bring the real-life labor strike of 1899 to life on the LECOM Stage.

31st Annual Blues and Jazz Fest Returns to Frontier Park

Erie's summer tradition is back and ready to rock

BEGINNING SATURDAY, AUG. 3

For over 30 years, the Erie Blues and Jazz festival has been one of Erie's most unique and important music festivals, hosted at Frontier Park. This summer fixture has featured world-class artists alongside local talent, who perform for thousands of residents over the first weekend in August. It's long served as a showcase for both up-and-coming artists and music legends, and carrying on the tradition this year are Dumpstaphunk, Barbara Blue featuring Bernard "Pretty" Purdie, and Terrance Simien and the Zydeco. A second stage, at the McCain Amphitheater, which is located near the Griff Slides, has been added that will feature local music performances, along with blues-based karaoke hosted by Matt "Broke" Boland.

This event is free for the entire community and needs the proper support to be done right. Regarding last year's hiatus for the festival, artistic director of the Blues And Jazz festival Matt Walker says, "A big part of that decision was financial. We quite simply cannot put on a world-class free festival without strong support from sponsors." Walker went on to say that "Thankfully, this year we have been able to overcome much of that challenge because of generous support from Fulton Athletic Club, Country Fair, Plastek, and others." They were also for-

tunate enough to secure some important grants, along with the support from the community through donations — the importance of support can't be undersold." Walker continues, "The grassroots support of the attendees, via the Bucket Brigade, is also very important. Everyone needs to do their part because this is a community effort."

This family-friendly event kicks off on Saturday, Aug. 3 and goes through Sunday, Aug. 4, starting at 10 a.m. both days. Saturday's highlights include two-time Grammy award-winning accordionist and composer Terrance Simien and his Zydeco band, followed by Dumpstaphunk, who is fronted by Ivan Neville, son of New Orleans legend Aaron Neville. Dumpstaphunk is a well-known name on the jazz and jam circuit, regarded for their grooves that blend funk, rock, jazz, and soul.

On Sunday, the festival will showcase an entire day of music honoring women in blues and jazz. Headliners will be Jennifer Stills (daughter of Stephen Stills) and Calvin "Fuzzy" Samuels (who performed on the album *4-Way Street*) performing a tribute to Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. Wrapping up the festival will be vocalist Barbara Blue, a Pittsburgh mainstay, performing for decades in the Steel City, alongside legendary jazz drummer Bernard Purdie (whose résumé includes



After a year's hiatus, the Erie Blues and Jazz fest is back in its traditional spot in Frontier Park for its 31st year. Catch headliners Dumpstaphunk (pictured) and multiple other world-class musicians alongside local talent at the defining musical event of Erie's summer.

collaborations with James Brown, Al Green, Jimmy Smith, Miles Davis, and B.B. King, amongst others). Purdie also has a signature drumming technique known as the "Purdie Shuffle," recognized by the use of triplets against a half-time backbeat.

This is one of the biggest Erie events of the year and it is totally free and open to the public; however, donations are accepted and greatly appreciated. Along

with buttons, there will also be t-shirts and other merchandise available. Vendors will also be on hand throughout the weekend offering food and beverages, along with arts and crafts. — Larry Wheaton

Saturday, Aug. 2 and Sunday, Aug. 3, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. // Frontier Park, 1501 W. 6th St. // Free // For full schedule and info: eriebluesandjazz.com

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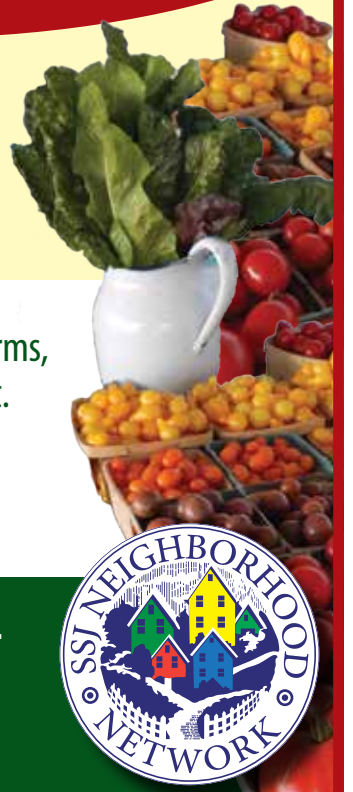
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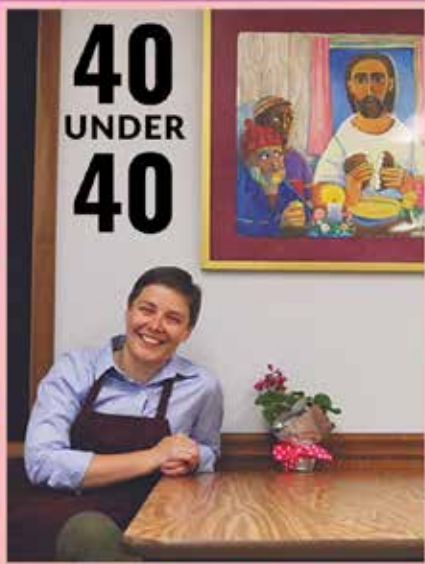
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40 Under 40 Catch-up: Jessica Yochim Taylor and Nick Taylor of MenajErie Studio

By: Jessica Hunter

The husband-and-wife team of Nick Taylor and Jessica Yochim Taylor has made a business of portraying Erie in its most flattering light, from sweeping natural panoramas to getting up close and personal with the grit of its industry. The pair's photography and videography studio, MenajErie, has become one of the most well-regarded in the region, garnering 40 Under 40 recognitions for each of its co-founders among other awards. Let's see what they've been up to!

Jessica Hunter (JH): You were each part of the 2017 and 2018 class. Catch us up! What's new? Can you share a recent project or two that you're particularly proud of? How did this project innovate within your industry, or the Erie community?

Jessica Yochim Taylor/Nick Taylor (JYT/NT): A lot has changed for us at MenajErie and we've grown as entrepreneurs. Since 2016, MenajErie braved the pandemic era shutdowns, moved into a larger office and studio space, evolved into a hybrid work environment, and expanded our skillset into the emerging tech of virtual production. The latter development allowed us to produce blended reality cutscenes for a video game publisher — a project we are particularly proud of as it provided a new challenge to our seasoned team of filmmakers.

Beyond MenajErie, we have started two new businesses since 2016. The first endeavor was a real estate investment firm that rehabilitates homes in the city and turns them into a mix of short and long term rentals. The second, more recent venture, is an immersive art installation design firm called Liquid Light Factory (LLF). LLF's work has been featured at FEED Media Art Center, and our first large-scale public art piece will be a permanent installation at the future Iron Works Square site on West 12th Street.

JH: How has your leadership style evolved since being featured in your respective 40 Under 40 issues? Can you pinpoint any specific experiences or events that have influenced this evolution?

JYT/NT: I think most business owners who made it through the pandemic were forced to undergo some significant changes to their leadership style. Leading a team of creatives virtually presented some logistical problems, especially in our industry where we need to share



Husband and wife team Jessica Yochim-Taylor and Nick Taylor were featured in subsequent classes of Erie's 40 Under 40 (Jessica in 2017, Nick in 2018). Jessica Hunter catches up with them to see how their business, MenajErie Studio, as well as their lives, have changed.

access to very large media files. But we all adapted and never really looked back. We realized the freedom and flexibility that remote and hybrid work offered our employees, and in turn, we changed our relationship with work for the better.

Although we enjoy engaging in new entrepreneurial pursuits, the biggest lesson we have learned is the value of time spent away from work. The question we ask ourselves now is not how can we maximize growth, but rather how can we maximize our unobligated time. We've realized the importance of time and space for new people, experiences, and opportunities to find their way into our lives.

JH: AI seems to be making massive headway in the video production industry. In what ways has technology shaped your work since your recognition? What is MenajErie doing to distinguish itself?

JYT/NT: Much like the technology behind virtual production, we view artificial intelligence as a tool to enhance our workflow. Where artificial intelligence really shines in the video production world

is in the iterative creative process. Using it, we are able to quickly brainstorm and workshop new ideas — it can essentially be a virtual writers room.

The challenge with AI in the creative fields is the question of intellectual property rights. What we consider "AI" are really enhanced search engines that are only as good as the dataset they are based on — other people's work. However, I think the reality is that most works of art are already derivative by nature — it's your personal lens through which you filter the world that adds something new. Copying and pasting from ChatGPT is not going to replace true human interpretation of the world.

JH: MenajErie has been in business for more than 10 years now. It's not easy to be successful for such a long time. What are your top 3 secrets to success?

JYT/NT: 1. Never stop learning. We think having a curious mind is not just essential to starting a business, but to living a good life. It's okay to not have all the answers or to not understand something. The important part is to not stop

there and learn something new.

2. People before profit. You can certainly make money while exploiting people — but not forever. The churn and burn business strategy leaves the landscape barren. If you invest in relationships and build a good reputation, success will find its way to you, and the community as a whole will be better off.

3. Be a good boss to yourself too! There is a toxic "grind" culture that permeates the entrepreneurial world. Especially for new solopreneurs, it's important to ask yourself how you would want a boss to treat you, and then model that for managing yourself. Working 70 hours a week? Taking calls at all hours of the day? Prioritizing work over personal life? If you wouldn't tolerate it from anyone else, then don't do it to yourself.

JH: Beyond professional life, what causes are you most passionate about, and how do you envision leaving a lasting impact on Erie?

JYT/NT: It's difficult for us to narrow our passions to specific causes, but we both are bullish on Erie as a whole. We



MenajErie Studio, the business and brainchild of Jessica Yochim-Taylor and Nick Taylor, is a video production company housed in Erie's Little Italy, which utilizes the couple's filmmaking backgrounds to produce high-quality visual content.

the highs and lows of working with your spouse? If you could describe each other as a cartoon icon, who would it be and why?

JYT/NT: Pros: We get to spend a lot of time together. Cons: We get to spend a lot of time together. In all seriousness, neither of us can imagine living life any other way. We are so in tune with each other that we can basically hear what the other is thinking before they say it. Working so intuitively with a partner provides a sense of confidence that is hard to replicate.

That being said, we are very different people, and sometimes being so connected can cause one another to assume wants and needs rather than asking about them. You can start to view your spouse as an extension of yourself and therefore subject to your own priorities and expectations. The solution of course is communication. Being able to communicate honestly and respectfully to one another can navigate you through even the most difficult times. If we had to personify ourselves as cartoon characters: We are like Boo and Sully from Monsters Inc. Jess is like Boo because she is fearless and has a boundless excitement for making new friends. Nick is like Sully because he is good-natured but stubborn. Boo is the perfect foil to Sully, and ultimately makes him a better person in the end. And, of course, they become best friends until the end!

More information about MenajErie Studio can be found at menajeriestudio.com

Jessica Hunter can be found at jessicahunterphotos.com

both volunteer our time on nonprofit boards that are shaping the future of Erie through community building, thoughtful development, and the enrichment of life in Erie through arts and culture. We think Erie is a hidden gem. We truly believe you'll never meet more resilient people in a town endowed with such amazing

potential.

When it comes to our personal passions, we both enjoy creating things. Nick is a musician, and plays in a band called Fox Grotto. He and his bandmates recently finished recording a full-length album that is slated to be released this year. You can also catch them live this year

at Celebrate Erie. Jess has developed a passion for stained glass and has created several pieces including windows for our 100-year-old home in the West Bayfront neighborhood. She enjoys the change of pace working with the physical as opposed to the digital.

JH: You're married. What are some of

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PODCAST REVIEW

***In Our Time*, produced by BBC Radio 4**

Academia neatly distilled for the everyday consumer

With over two million listeners per episode, perhaps I don't need to be praising the weekly BBC podcast *In Our Time* — the numbers certainly speak for themselves. Yet, I find it is worthwhile to revisit popular podcasts, especially when that popularity aligns with its quality.

Every week, I settle in to listen to British parliamentarian and author Melvyn Bragg interview a panel of three academics on specialized subjects. The topics range broadly, from famous literary works to historical events or complex scientific ideas. Most recently, Melvyn and his guests have covered the life and works of European playwright Bertolt Brecht, Napoleon's return to power in France known as the "Hundred Days," and Aristophanes' fourth-century comedy *Lysistrata*, in which the women of Athens secured peace by waging a sex strike.

Pitched as a discussion about the "ideas, people and events that have



also its personal uses, like making me a well-rounded conversationalist, an excellent trivia team member, and an ever-improving *Jeopardy!* player. For example, the very first episode that I encountered was on Thorstein Veblen's foundational work *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, published in 1899. Though I had never even heard of Ve-

With over 1,000 episodes available wherever you listen to your podcasts, *In Our Time* offers listeners rich educational content in an approachable and concise format. Whether you simply want to know more about the world around you, fill out the gaps in your historical knowledge, or bolster your trivia skills, *In Our Time* has something for everyone.

shaped our world," *In Our Time* offers an entry point into subject matter too often confined within academic circles.

Mediated through the questioning of Melvyn — often as simple as "So who was Napoleon?" — the podcast is accessible for all listeners through compact hour-long episodes. Covering a single topic per episode, this format is especially appealing to podcast listeners who find themselves unable to commit to ten-part deep dives into one subject. However, for those especially interested in the subject, each episode also contains an extensive reading list to go with it as well as the names of the interviewed academics for easy Googling.

For me, the brilliance of *In Our Time* lies in both its broad applications, such as better understanding the state of the world as it is today, but

blen, the episode instantly hooked me because of its engaging and accessible discussion of capitalism and consumerism. While providing me with the language to crush a trivia question about economic history — I'm still waiting to break out "conspicuous consumption" at the dinner table — I also saw the ways in which Veblen's theory echoed into our modern era, such as providing context about the construction of Gilded-Age mansions in Erie's now-historic districts.

With over 1,000 episodes available wherever you listen to your podcasts, *In Our Time* offers listeners rich educational content in an approachable and concise format. Whether you simply want to know more about the world around you, fill out the gaps in your historical knowledge, or bolster your trivia skills, *In Our Time* has something for everyone. — Sarah Bahm

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FOOD

The Erie Cook Book Revisited: Penn'a Punch

A twist on Paris Punch, perfect for your next Kettle Drum

I often seek out the little madness that comes from hosting. A visit from a friend isn't always planned. On the daily, I encourage people to just pop in on me.

In the “Social Entertainments” chapter of *The Erie Cook Book* (1881), our hostess, Laura Sterrett describes a “Kettle Drum” in just over 1,000 words. Her voice indicates that these gatherings were rife with mischief and only her most-trusted friends were invited. A “cameras off” type of Victorian hangout where the tea is spiked and spilled. As she says, “These evening tea-drinkings are not governed by any such set of laws that an original-minded hostess cannot innovate without being made out as peculiar.”

If one were to receive an invitation under this whimsical moniker, it would be in the form of a visitation card and one could expect to be a guest for tea anytime from 4 o'clock into the early evening. One may note an embossed tea kettle, indicating any questions you may have on the manner of the event. Teas of various flavors should be served, but not too strong. The food isn't fussy or expensive, but that of a nibbling nature.

Please, by all means, break up the humdrum of my day and stamp a memory on it — my stove is always on and I'll always offer to brew up a pot of something. The people in my life are to comfort as leaves are to tea; essential for brewing a nest of warmth. — Morgan Yezzi



As the summer cracks on, serve a Penn'a Punch

Yield: two 4 oz. cocktails

- 1/2 cup or 4 oz. brewed green tea
- 1/4 cup or 2 oz. brandy
- 1/4 cup or 2 oz. lemon syrup
- Seasonal fruit garnish

Tea: Bring 4 cups of water to just below a boil and take it off the heat. Pour the water over 1/4 cup of looseleaf green tea or eight teabags. Let it steep and come to room temperature.

Lemon Syrup: zest three lemons and rub 1/4 cup of sugar into the zest to combine. Roll the zested lemons and then juice them into the sugar and zest. Whisk until the sugar is combined.

Punch: Pour the tea, brandy, and syrup into a shaker and go for 20 rounds. Dip the rim of a tea cup in the lemon syrup and coat it in sugar or salt. Fill the tea-cup with crushed ice and top off the cup.

Garnish: crushed mulberries or strawberries

Blood Money

Hit Man is a charming combination of actor and director

★★★★★

One of the biggest joys of watching a movie is the vicarious thrill of briefly inhabiting a much more exciting life. For a few hours we can experience being a globe-trotting adventurer or a super suave secret agent. Naturally, Richard Linklater gives us his own unique take on this thrill with his new film *Hit Man*, a funny and very likable romantic comedy. While the third act does go a little too far into the realm of the ridiculous, it works thanks to Linklater's mastery of dialogue and a perfectly cast lead actor.

Very loosely based on the true story of Gary Johnson (Glen Powell), a mild-mannered philosophy professor at a New Orleans community college who spends his free time posing as a contract killer to assist in police stings. Gary fully commits to the life of a professional hit man, but when he falls for one of his "clients," Madison (Adria Arjona), does she love him or his deadly alter ego? And how far will he take his role to win her affections?

This story is Powell's show and he proves more than up to the task, convincing us that he is both a kind-hearted teacher and a deadly assassin. Linklater gives us a modern take on the classic screwball comedy and like those films, he fills it with smart, witty dialogue and the boundless chemistry between the two leads. This is the guy who gave us the *Before Trilogy* after all.

The film loses itself a little in the end, straining credibil-



ity even for a story this outlandish, but it still makes for inherently watchable entertainment. *Hit Man* is currently available on Netflix. — Forest Taylor

Directed by Richard Linklater // Written by Linklater and Glen Powell // Based on a Texas Monthly article by Skip Hollandsworth // Starring Glen Powell, Adria Arjona, Austin Amelio, Retta, Sanjay Rao, Molly Bernard, Evan Holtzman, and Gralen Bryant Banks // Netflix // 116 minutes // Rated R

The Bikeriders is a Throwback in Many Different Ways

What are you rebelling against?

★★★★

New film by Jeff Nichols (*Take Shelter, Mud*) *The Bikeriders* harkens back to the auteur-driven films of the New Hollywood from the 1960s and '70s both in its setting and subject matter. It is a film more interested in mood and character than big ideas or action set pieces. And while it contains admirable filmmaking, it doesn't quite reach the heights of the best that this genre can provide. That said, it is nice to see a film of this type in theaters again.

Based on Danny Lyon's book, written while traveling with a group of bikers from 1967 to 1973, the film follows Lyon (played by Mike Faist) as he interviews various members of The Vandals, a Chicago based biker community, in particular the strong-willed Kathy (Jodie Comer) and her husband Benny (Austin Butler, channeling Brando with every ounce of his being). As the years move on, the community grows, and more violent and dangerous people get involved, challenging the authority of the group's mysterious leader Johnny (Tom Hardy).

Nichols is clearly inspired by the films of Martin Scorsese, both in his rapid editing and roaming camera as well as the film's messages about American masculinity and the appeal of watching a tight-knit group of unsavory characters. However, it never reaches the entertaining levels of those particular films. The story of bike gangs as a kind of haven for society's outsiders is always intriguing, but this film doesn't really say anything differ-



ent from what so many other films in the genre have already said. — Forest Taylor

Directed by Jeff Nichols // Inspired by the book by Danny Lyon // Starring Jodie Comer, Austin Butler, Tom Hardy, Mike Faist, Michael Shannon, Boyd Holbrook, Michael Abbott Jr., Damon Herriman, Emory Cohen, Karl Glusman, Toby Wallace, Paul Sparks, Beau Knapp, Happy Anderson, and Norman Reedus // Focus Features // 116 minutes // Rated R



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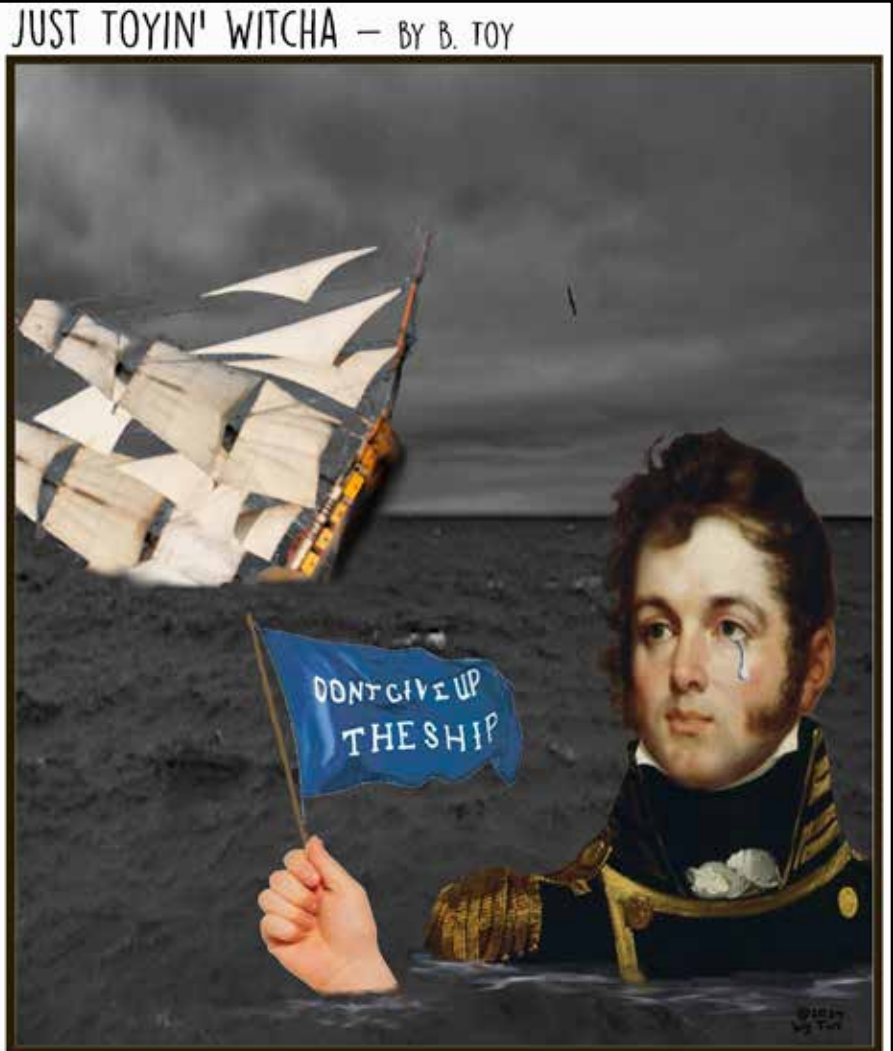
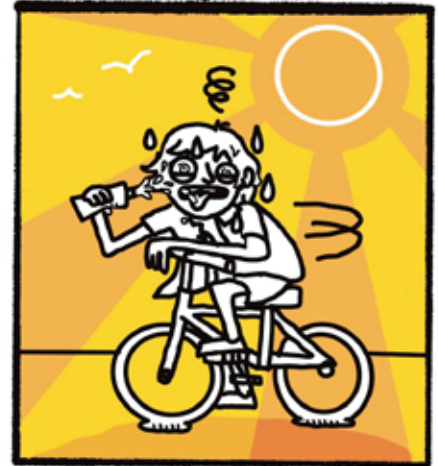
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FRIDGE COMICS

BY Anthony @antsart+house



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- 3:30 pm Shaun Booker Dammit Band
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- 8:00 pm Barbara Blue featuring Bernard "Pretty" Purdie

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The Black Sunshines

Volume III
Self-Released



Avant garde artists like Captain Beefheart made it clear one did not need to record in traditional studios like Abbey Road, with over-the-top production. Decades later, musicians like Steve Albini would create an entire album on a cassette tape four-track recorder easily utilized in any kitchen or bedroom. These days laptops with audio interfaces are cranking out work through apps like GarageBand from anywhere and with higher quality. Here is where we find Erie's The Black Sunshines (Louis Rullo Johnston). His third release of 2024, *Volume III* consists of eight broadly varied digitally-voiced and traditionally-played compositions. Tracks "Part A" and "Part C" are like the heaviest of metal — bombastic and forceful. The dissonance of the tracks recalls the earlier works of Throbbing Gristle or the admittedly influential Swans. "Part B" and "Part G" still maintain the unresolved discord yet with a more organic feel, like Legendary Pink Dots or even early Tropicala. The cadence of these pieces is less refined. They are raw and unbridled although deliberate — more like Karlheinz Stockhausen or John Cage. These pieces form from a primordial ooze and continue to move with a certain degree of entropy, like the best of Grateful Dead's "Space." As Rullo Johnston's work matures, I look forward to seeing where he will take us. — Melissa Sullivan Shimek

**Ray & the County Kind**

Courtesy of a Dirt Road Vol. 1
Self-released



There's nothing like some good old-fashioned country music to soothe your weary soul. Wait, did I read that right? Yes, *county*. This is where Ray & the County Kind live, a bluegrass-infused, rollicking country celebration that's at home along the rural routes of Pennsylvania. Don't forget that even at the city's center, you're barely 10 miles away from the nearest dirt road. It's this acknowledgment, a sort of winking authenticity, that makes these five songs as successful as they are. Well, that and some of the best damned musicianship you might ever hear. There's the downright amazing guitar skills of Jonathan Nolan, one of Erie's most underrated virtuosos. Just take a listen to the extended intro to "Hell of a Friend" to hear that fast-picking glory. You have the great Tanner Edwards on upright bass, providing the perfect backbone, along with one of Erie's best drummers, the always tasteful and supremely skilled Steve Barone (eagle-eared listeners will even catch a couple of stylistic inside jokes thrown in there). The band is fronted by the titular vocalist and fiddle/mandolin/guitar player Ryan Ray, his growly vocals serving up the perfect bite for a band this far north of the Mason-Dixon line. — Nick Warren

**Charli XCX**

Brat
Atlantic Records



The Cambridge queen's sixth studio album is the soundtrack to the greatest house party you were never invited to.



In the world of contemporary pop music, Charli XCX is an artist who rarely gets the credit she deserves. From her boundary-pushing collaborations with the PC Music collective in the mid-2010s, the artist worked to define the current hyperpop soundscape on her *Pop 2* mixtape. Since then, she has refined her craft, getting sharper with each subsequent project. *Brat* is the manifestation of Charli reaching that pinnacle.

From the first track, Charli captivates with crisp and infectious production. However, what sets *Brat* apart is that the mesmerizing aura of the record never stops. The perfectly curated 42 minutes is pure audiophile energy as every track flows into the next. From the powerful anthems of "Club classics" and "Von dutch" to the introspective ballads of "So I" and "I think about it all the time," the singer and her collaborators create a soundcycle that is equally as infectious as it is profound.

Brat is nothing short of extraordinary. Charli XCX has created her tour de force: the record that will define pop music for the rest of the 2020s. — Nathaniel Clark

Vince Staples

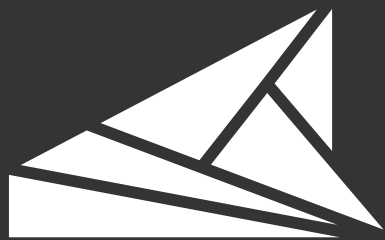
Dark Times
Def Jam Recordings



Vince Staples is tired; at least, he sounds that way. The rapper's sixth studio album arrives with lots of context around it being his last for Def Jam Recordings, all while he prepares for a second season of *The Vince Staples Show* over at Netflix. However, Staples' sheepish flow feels more like a feature than a bug these days; after releasing 2017's eclectic *Big Fish Theory*, an album literally designed to soundtrack movie trailers, he went on to deliver his self-titled magnum opus, a down-to-earth record complimented by vibey instrumentals courtesy of beloved producer Kenny Beats.

Instrumentally, *Dark Times* seems to fall somewhere between 2021's *Vince Staples* and 2022's clubbier *Ramona Park Broke My Heart*. Not unlike his Netflix show, Staples is left rapping about the way his life has changed with fame, a move that will either completely work for or frustrate listeners. This is consistent across the record as elsewhere Staples raps in somewhat empty platitudes ("Life hard, but I go harder," on "Little Homies") and offers a pleasant but strange spoken word outro ("Why Won't The Sun Come Out?") about visions and out-of-body experiences to close the record. Afterwards, one is left wondering whether this could be his last album for the foreseeable future, as well as how he manages to stay so mesmerizing even on such a lackadaisical effort. — Aaron Mook

TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



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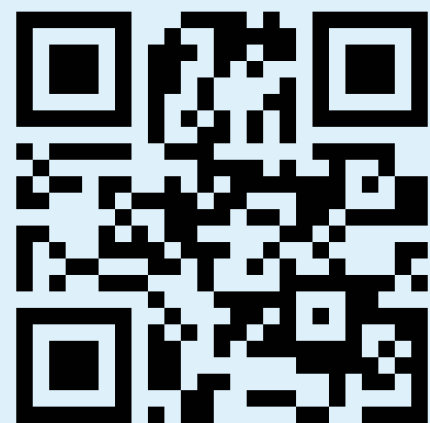
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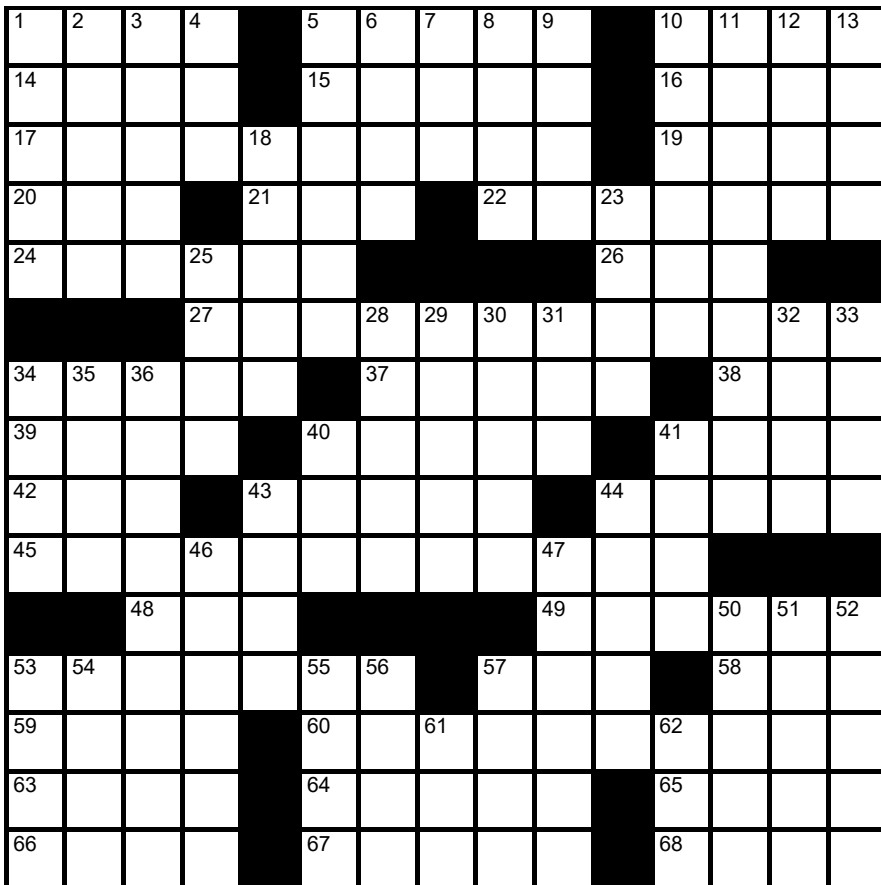


Jimmy Eat World
saturday august 17



Gabby Barrett
sunday august 18

CROSSWORD



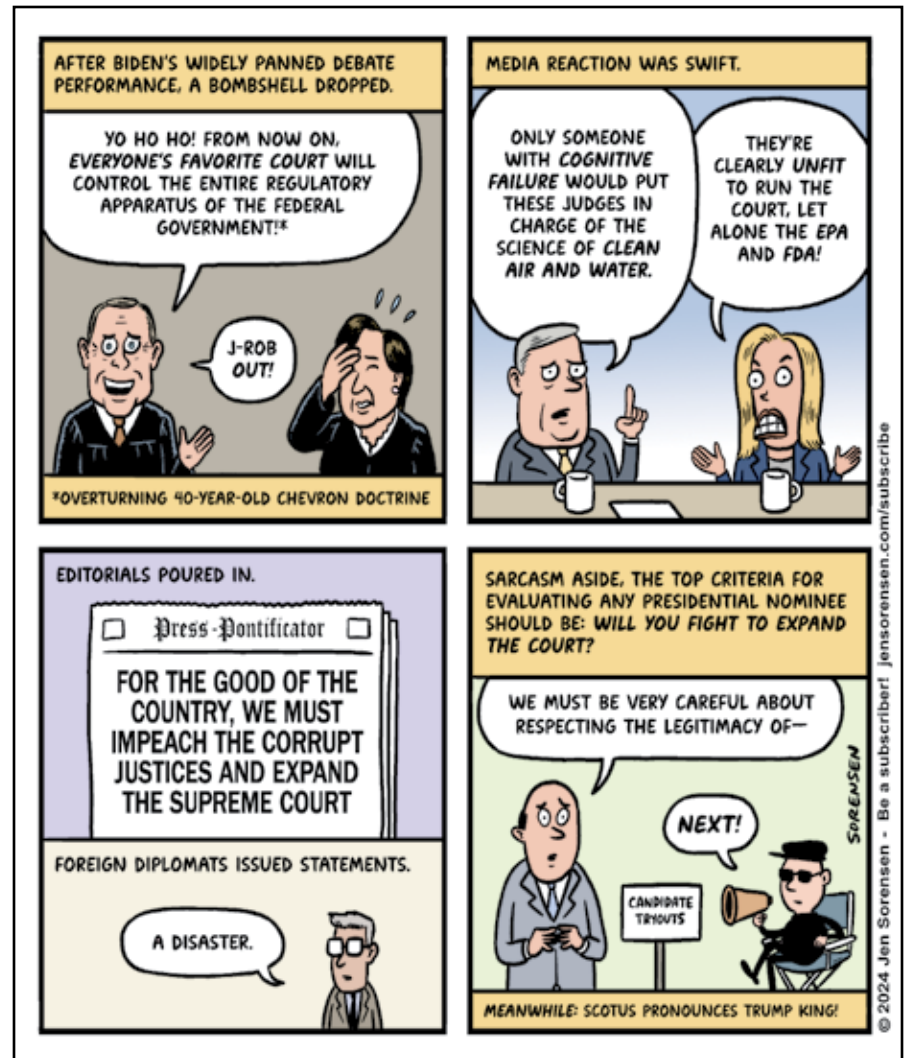
Across

1. Lingerie buy, for short
5. MDX and RDX maker
10. Chest muscles, briefly
14. ___ Mills (bygone photography business)
15. Kidney-related
16. "Magnum P.I." setting
17. A "Sesame Street" monster's butt?
19. Cherry part
20. "... ___ the fields we go"
21. "Bill ___ Saves the World"
22. Samplers of sorts
24. Bagel cheese
26. Writer Fleming
27. U.K. city with a lot of bridge discards?
34. Actress Lively
37. Went too far, like a sentence
38. Teensy
39. Puerto Rican pop star Fonsi
40. He preceded Liz and Rishi
41. "Me as well"
42. Tool for rowing
43. Eldest Stark daughter on "Game of Thrones"
44. Watch covertly
45. Prescription taken while in restraints?
48. "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" announcer Wilson
49. In a bawdy way
53. With 60-Across, possibility with shoddy "Survivor" merchandise?

57. "Wahoo!" in Oaxaca
58. Singer Corinne Bailey
59. Not achromatic
60. See 53-Across
63. Ski resort near Park City
64. Actor Michael, subject of dueling impersonations in "The Trip"
65. Tennis tournament
66. Dishevel, as hair
67. Not acquired, in some poems
68. "I, Claudius" emperor

Down

1. Hot mugful
2. Skin lotion ingredient sources
3. Language where "How's it going?" is "Kei te pehea koe?"
4. Do a comic book job
5. Words before "kidding" or "serious"
6. Forfeit
7. Burmese leader of the 1950s
8. Whitewater ride
9. ___ Romeo (Italian car)
10. Mail-related
11. Corroded
12. "Believe" Grammy winner
13. Added amounts
18. Fireplace nook
23. Roadside marker
25. Puts in the form of a question
28. Fern leaf
29. Iran's official language
30. Early supercomputer
31. Votes of opposition
32. Fish in a Pixar pic
33. Cookbook author Paula
34. Allied nations
35. Pacific island party
36. Groups of planes, collectively
40. Mid-2010s term of endearment
41. Blow out, as a volcano
43. Broadcast TV censor's concern, once
44. Villainous look
46. Acting family of three generations
47. "Yeah, right!"
50. Arrange loosely
51. Bronny James, as of a recent draft pick
52. Like some two-choice questions
53. "Careless Whisper" duo
54. "Shoresy" streamer, stateside
55. Tuskegee or Spelman, for short
56. Actor Morton who played King George in "Hamilton" (and whose son played "Young Sheldon")
57. "That's ___ concern to you!"
61. Newton's tree?
62. Long time



Answers to last puzzle



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