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## ERIE READER

Aug. 2024 // Vol. 14 No. 8 // ErieReader.com

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## From the Editors

### About-face

In last month's edition of From the Editors, this writer, along with an op-ed written by Jeff Bloodworth, lamented the loss of true patriotism in recent generations — highlighting the hopelessness that we are collectively feeling, which prevents us from having true, sustainable pride in the direction of our country.

Fast-forward one month and suddenly, national pride seems a little easier to come by.

Thanks, in part, to an uplifting announcement from our current president, who, by putting country over ego, stepped down from the race (which also happened to result in a 700 percent spike in daily voter registration — patriotism made manifest in process participation).

And thanks, in part, to Snoop Dogg and Flavor Flav — the Olympic folk heroes we didn't know we needed — bringing a wholesome, authentic enthusiasm that is, frankly, a patriotic pleasure to witness.

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If last month's inspiring announcement of Erie's 40 Under 40 class of 2024 wasn't enough to buoy your spirits, Erie Gives Day should have them floating above water soon enough. The 14th annual event administered by the Erie Community Foundation has us celebrating and collectively supporting those nonprofits that make our region something to be proud of.

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Oh yes, and thanks, in part, to all of the *incredibly* impressive American Olympic athletes who can get even the harshest domestic critic jumping off their couch, chanting, "USA! USA!" as Simone Biles and Katie Ledecky and Bobby Finke (among many, many others) blast through records at an astounding rate — making national pride a bit easier to come by.

And locally? If last month's inspiring announcement of Erie's 40 Under 40 class of 2024 wasn't enough to buoy your spirits, Erie Gives Day should have them floating above water soon enough. The 14th annual event administered by the Erie Community Foundation has us celebrating and collectively supporting (much like the pillars of the historic beaux arts building that houses the Foundation — artfully represented on this month's cover by Nick Warren) those nonprofits that make our region something to be proud of.

Many organizations depend on our community's support during this event — and Erie is always ready to show up. We have collectively given \$56.6 million over the past 14 years.

Talk about civic pride — this is it, Erie. You've got it.

And as we watch the numbers at eriegives.org tick ever upward on Tuesday, Aug. 13, as more and more of us donate to all of the participating, community-changing organizations, may we all feel that same patriotic, Olympic energy.

Is anyone up for a chant? Erie! Erie! Erie!



# Firsthand Perspectives from the Israel-Hamas War

“From the river to the sea, we all need psychology”

By: Jeff Bloodworth

Rebbi Hanan thinks the Israel-Hamas War results from a soul problem. He told me, “Israelis and Palestinians are sick in the heart. It is the hubris of exclusivity. The other people don’t exist.”

Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger lives in Palestine’s West Bank where he runs Roots, an organization dedicated to Israeli-Palestinian coexistence. His Palestinian counterpart, Noor Awad, explained that through Roots he learned it is possible, “to keep your [Palestinian] identity while also recognizing the other side.”

But for most Israelis and Palestinians this uneasy dance of the heart has never been more difficult.

On Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacked southern Israel’s rural, agricultural *kibbutzim*. Militants butchered 1,200, including the elderly and toddlers; they sexually assaulted scores of women before dragging 251 Israelis back to Gaza and into captivity.

The Israeli response was to unleash 70,000 tons of bombs, dropping more armaments on Gaza than Dresden, Hamburg, and London combined during World War II. What began as a defensible war to remove Hamas has devolved into a grinding campaign of collective punishment on all Gazans.

Dr. Baher Ghosheh, professor emeritus of Middle Eastern Studies at PennWest-Edinboro and scholar-in-residence at the Jefferson Educational Society, told me the Israeli airstrikes have “destroyed every school, every church, and every mosque” in Gaza. In June, I went to the Gaza border. The bombs and artillery shook the desert. I felt ill.

Later, an American described her experience of that scene to me. She seemed vaguely “thrilled” by the drama of it all.

Israelis and Palestinians are not the only ones “sick in the heart.”

To date 2,874 Israelis and 35,091 Gazans have been killed in the 10-month war — but for the pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian camps, only one body count matters; there is only one narrative. Rabbi Hanan reminded me, “If you only know one story of this land then you are living a falsehood.”

Reem al-Misky knows the Palestinian side. The holistic therapist and Erie resident’s family hails from Syria. There, her parents, a physician and midwife, engaged closely with Palestinians. In the war’s first weeks, al-Misky lost a friend in Gaza — Hiba, an artist. Hiba’s last social media post was of herself in a bird cage with a dove. Reem is rightfully furious.

She calls Israel a “Zionist, apartheid regime.” I see her point. But reality is more complicated. As my friend Alon Benach puts it, “You can say we [Jews] belong differently to the Middle East.”

Jews have lived continuously in Palestine/Israel for 3,500 years. After the 1st century AD, most were driven outside their “promised land.” But the final words of the traditional Seder, “next year in Jerusalem,” captures how Judaism ties its people to “Eretz Yisrael.” In the 1890s, Zionists responded to centuries of Chris-

JEFF BLOODWORTH



In a recent trip to Israel and the West Bank, Jeff Bloodworth along with his colleague and friend Professor Andrew Caswell discuss the Israel-Hamas war from the ground as they examine the seemingly hopeless, no-win scenario that has developed amidst an ever-climbing body count.

tian antisemitism, with a movement for a Jewish state in their ancestral land.

Before Oct. 7, Alon agreed with Reem. An Israeli who called himself a “non-Zionist Jew,” he left Israel for Poland. But Europe’s pro-Hamas protests changed him. Weeks ago, protestors outside Krakow’s Jewish Community Center chanted, “Zionists go home.”

Alon interpreted these marches to me, “You don’t want us in Palestine. You don’t want us in Europe. You seem like you don’t want us to exist. Jew die.” Antisemitism turned Alon into a Zionist. The story is much the same for many 20th century Jews.

Driven by antisemitism, Zionism gained force. By the 1930s, 400,000 Jews lived alongside 800,000 Palestinians in Israel/Palestine. By 1948, the Holocaust had converted most surviving Jews into ardent Zionists.

Rabbi Rob Morais explained this to me. The leader of Erie’s Temple Anshe Heseid is the son and grandson of Holocaust survivors. His family learned from history, “Don’t think you are safe.” Centuries before the Holocaust, antisemitism drove his family from Spain to Italian ghettos before they were pushed to Turkey and finally North Africa. After the Holocaust, the family settled in Canada. There his grandmother warned him “Canada is a great place to live. We love it here. But have your passport ready.” She kept three loaves of bread in the freezer, just in case.

In 1948, Zionism resulted in a Jewish state. Palestine was to be divided in half to create a Jewish and Pales-

tinian state. Palestinians were understandably angry. Europeans had masterminded the Holocaust, yet it was Palestinians who paid the price. Zionism might be liberation for Jews, but it was al-Nakba (the disaster) for Palestinians. Arabs attacked. Israel’s victory made Zionism into a political reality. But the war created hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees.

Today, there are more than 8 million descendants of those Palestinians. They live in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and in various Arab and Western nations. Many seek a “right to return” to what are now Israeli lands. But in so doing, Palestinians would outnumber Jews in what is the world’s only Jewish state. For Israelis, that is a non-starter.

Rabbi Hanan told me, “I should not live in the land of Israel at the expense of the Palestinian people. That is evil. That is wrong.” He wants peace, as does Noor. But many Palestinians refuse to recognize Israel’s right to exist. Many Israelis respond by denying Palestinian peoplehood.

Through the years, Reem, and her sisters, all health-care professionals, have traveled to Lebanon to treat Palestinian refugees. Denied a right to return to their homes and basic dignity in every Arab nation except Jordan, they long for what every human wants — a better life.

Since 1948, Arab states have battled Israel. The 1967 War resulted in Israel capturing the West Bank and Gaza. This is home to millions of Palestinians. In the





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JEFF BLOODWORTH



This pile of rubble in the West Bank was intentionally bulldozed to this spot to block a key road – a tactic used by Israeli forces to “humiliate Palestinians,” and which serve to turn would-be short trips into long, arduous treks.

1990s, the Oslo Peace Process very nearly resulted in a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. But Palestinian and Israeli radicals killed this plan.

What Palestinians call the West Bank is Judea and Samaria to Israel's ultra-orthodox. They deem this land holy. In 2000, there were 80,000 Jewish West Bank “settlers.” After the peace process failed, more than a million “settled” there.

For academics, the West Bank “occupation” is complicated. But for Jiries Giacaman it is simple: the Israe-

lis are choking Palestinian life. The owner of an olive wood factory in Bethlehem, his family has lost 90 percent of their olive groves to Israeli land grabs. Since the war, security checkpoints have turned his wife's 6-kilometer commute to Jerusalem into a 2-hour marathon. Of Giacaman's 45 high school classmates, he is the last man standing. Palestinians with means leave. He told me, “The big problem is that my kids felt they belonged more in Texas than here. It is freer in Texas (for a Palestinian). Life is getting harder.” Gritting his teeth, he confessed, “My grandkids won't stay here.”

In this darkness, Dr. Andrew Caswell gives me hope.

A colleague and close friend, Caswell traveled to Israel and the West Bank with me. The Gannon University psychology professor deems himself “pro-Palestinian.” That stance has not changed. In the West Bank, he saw a bulldozed pile of rubble blocking a road. An Israeli gambit intended to humiliate Palestinians, Caswell said “It felt like a giant middle finger.” We climbed the roadblock. Nearby, a Palestinian girl did the same, laughing as she did so, but this is no game. For Palestinians, roadblocks turn short trips into grueling ordeals. Frustrated, Caswell said, “one of these days, the little girl will see the rubble for what it is. That is the day her childhood ends.”

While in Israel, Caswell met with American and Israeli Jews. He told me, “I now understand something from someone else's perspective. That is easy to say but hard to do.” He heard stories about historic and contemporary antisemitism. He acknowledged, “The

denial of Jewish peoplehood is something I was surprised by.” But he is quick to say, “I have not massively flip-flopped. I am not turning into [Pennsylvania's pro-Israel Senator] Fetterman.”

Ultimately, Caswell agrees with Rabbi Hanan and Noor. He said, “They [Palestinians and Israelis] both think their grievances are legitimate. When everyone has their own information, you don't see anyone else's perspective. Then you don't see their suffering as legitimate.” Despairing, he explained “I'm pessimistic because I don't see any brave leaders.”

Dr. Ghosheh agrees. He told me, “You need visionary leadership” because “Both [sides] are captives of their radicals.” To him, a few minor border adjustments could create a two-state solution and peace.

That path is blocked by a “From the River to the Sea” mentality. Rabbi Hanan and Noor defined this as endemic on both sides. They told me, “All of us live in the hubris that one another will leave.” In this scenario, Israel/Palestine, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, will belong to either the Israelis or Palestinians. Rabbi Hanan counsels against this zero-sum thinking, “Palestinians and Israelis — each have no other place to go. We will live with one another until the end of time. Either killing each other or living in peace.”

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

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# Paying Homage to the Past, Building the Brighter Future

Erie's Black Wall Street networks and connects nearly 200 Black-owned businesses

By: Ben Spegen

Over a hundred years ago, in the Greenwood neighborhood of Tulsa, Oklahoma, 71 grocery stores and meat markets accounted for two-thirds of the 108 Black-owned businesses operating in a community of some 10,000 residents. Eleven of the businesses were boarding and room houses, along with five hotels. Nine different billiard halls provided spaces to gather, play, talk, and be.

In 1921, over a dozen Black physicians and surgeons practiced and operated in Greenwood. There were two dentists tending to the community's teeth while four were employed as pharmacists. Six Black professionals worked as loan and insurance agents and real estate brokers, and another three were lawyers. From shoemakers to tailors, painters to building contractors, another two dozen were Black crafters. Twelve barbers, six shoe shiners, and five clothes-cleaning shops comprised the service sector.

That is the brighter side of history.

The dark side of history is that over a hundred years ago in the Greenwood neighborhood of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921, from May 31 to June 1, one of the deadliest racial massacres in U.S. history occurred.

So the story began — Dick Rowland, a young Black man, rode in an elevator with Sarah Page, a young white woman. As the story spread from person to person, allegations of what happened grew and swelled, from ogling to harassing, from attacking to raping, to a point that an incensed white mob descended upon Greenwood.

Ultimately, they'd torch blocks of the neighborhood, decimating Black-owned homes and businesses. Many died, more were injured and hospitalized, and even more Black residents interred — all from an area known as Black Wall Street.

Even if the number was one — and it is far more than that — it would have been too many. Prosperity, hope, the shining light of the American Dream realized by many over the years was snuffed out in a matter of hours.

At that time, Greenwood was a "Black Wall Street." From West Ninth Street in Atlanta, to Bronzeville in Chicago, and Hayti in Durham, North Carolina, to others in Arkansas, Mississippi and beyond, Black citizens were creating and establishing wealth throughout the nation in concentrated communities. Tulsa's story takes up more pages in history books, perhaps because of the sudden, violent nature of how the tragedy occurred.

That shining light in other communities, in other towns and cities, however, was dimmed over time — choked out by policy and cultural misconceptions.

But before 1921 lies the story of a nation brought forth on land inhabited by people already calling it home — a nation to be built on the backs of people brought here against their will to till and tend, cultivate and harvest, make and produce a nation that would, for the only time to date, divide after having

ROMO PICS



The movers and shakers behind Erie's Black Wall Street, who helped to establish the nonprofit in 2020, have worked to create a "pathway to empowerment and prosperity in Erie's Black community." August being National Black Business Month, the work of Erie's Black Wall Street and the businesses it represents is taking center stage.

united to wage a war over who was a person and who was property, or less-than human. And after, lies the story of a nation that, nearly a hundred years after reuniting, would heed the call to prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, and national origin, yet still simultaneously struggle and strive to achieve the recognition that *all* people are created equal, and *all* have the right to the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. Knowing and acknowledging our history — how many Black businesses were built, how many were shuttered or destroyed not because they were unsuccessful, but because they were Black — is, of course, important. Important, too, is to know the story that despite real discrimination — from people's misguided perceptions to antiquated public policy — still, today, Black businesses and centers for Black commerce rise — like Erie's Black Wall Street (EBWS).

Heralded on its website as "your pathway to empowerment and prosperity in Erie's Black community," the drivers behind Erie's Black Wall Street "are dedicated to fostering Black excellence and wealth while building a stronger, more connected community."

The idea emerged when college friends — DaVona Pacely and Angelica Spraggins (who are married,

and were founding board members) and Kyra Taylor — began imagining how to form a better connection between Black-led activities and Black-owned businesses throughout Erie County. They lengthened the table, and as the group of historians, social workers, and therapists continued having the conversation, the concept of Erie's Black Wall Street as that driver of economic and social change and advancement emerged in January 2018, first as a Facebook group.

"We were having this conversation about our history," Taylor, executive director of Erie's Black Wall Street, told me about how the group decided upon the name. "There were many Black Wall Streets across the United States, and we saw what tragedy happened to them. But they were effective and efficient — and we wanted to have that, and to honor what they went through, and to support our business owners and our community members to have a better way of life here."

Here is Erie — a county once dubbed by online listicle manufacturer 24/7 Wall St as "the worst place for Black people to live," Taylor told me, and home to one of the poorest ZIP codes in the nation.

"We wanted to take something that was negative and turn it back into something that's beautiful," Tay-





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lor explained.

When it launched, EBWS quickly amassed a list of some hundred businesses led by Black owners who wanted to be a part of the network. Today, Taylor told me it's nearly doubled.

Investment in EBWS — the fuel to power the empowerment — is also growing. EBWS receives support locally from Diverse Erie, the Hamot Health Foundation, and the Erie Community Foundation — as well as Erie Gives Day, the foundation's annual community fundraising drive. It's secured outside-the-area funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Black Equity Coalition. That has led to, in 2023 alone, an EBWS investment of over \$133,000 in the Black community through programming, entrepreneurial initiatives, and community building.

That includes Erie's Black Wall Street's Pathway to Homeownership.

The program, which drew 70 registrants in 2023, engages participants over four consecutive Saturdays — providing them with information about personal credit, mortgage lending, and the ins and outs of the home-buying process. That involves history lessons on how race and culture have impacted homeownership for Black people. At the end of the four weeks, winners are randomly selected, and, in 2023, three participants were awarded \$21,000 to be used towards the down payment on a house.

"In 2020, the year EBWS was founded as a nonprofit, the homeownership rates for Black residents were just 1.9 percent," Taylor told me. "We want to change that."

One example of EBWS's endeavors to positively impact the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem is the team's partnership with Bridgeway Capital's Minority Owned Business Incubator. Together, they've launched Vanguard Erie — a co-managed pilot program that provides "comprehensive support, education, mentorship, and funding opportunities to help minority business owners launch and grow their operations successfully," Taylor explained.

"I applied for that program because I was looking for guidance as far as what to do when starting a new business, and then what direction I should go with this new business," Mabel Howard told me.

Howard, no stranger to business, opened Café 7-10

— a bakery, a gathering space, and a place to recite, read, and listen to poetry — with her mother, Thelma Mae Blanks-Howard, in 2019. Howard's next venture — not that she's leaving Café 7-10 (the numbers of which are her mother's birthday) — is Brown Girl Penning, a creative marketing agency.

"My goal is to be the go-to promotions agency for artists, arts organizations, and small businesses — and I'd like to do that in a poetic way," Howard, a well-known and talented poet, told me.

That idea came to Howard when she realized that through her prior work she's helped promote dozens of poets and artists over the past few years. They recognized her skills and worth, and so did she.

"I believe in growing together, and I feel like I've put that time in," Howard said of turning a passion into a profession. "I've put in the seeds to grow with these artists, and I'm ready to take them to the next level as I also grow to the next level financially."

Turning to Erie's Black Wall Street, which she'd done first as it was establishing, "just made sense," Howard told me, because of the network and resources. "Erie's Black Wall Street has been able to broaden my worldview as far as the need for my services, and the money that could possibly be waiting for me in different areas outside of Erie and beyond."

In addition to Erie's Black Wall Street's website, there is another way people calling Erie home, visitors passing by, or voyeurs looking in can connect with Black-owned businesses. The EBWS app — an adaptation and evolution of the long-running Erie Metropolitan Black Yellow Pages published by Cynthia Muhammad — gives users the ability to "have access to Black-owned businesses at their fingertips," Taylor explained. "You can scroll through the different categories of businesses and get their information. It's important because those Black business owners need to have support and need to have visibility for existing and new customers."

An idea inspired by the brilliant successes of Tulsa, Oklahoma (despite their bitter cost) and its consequent nonprofit have taken root in Erie and are growing.

The mornings for Kyra Taylor and her team can be early, and the nights can be long — just like those of the business owners she works to inform, connect,

and support. But to Taylor, it is all worth it, and adding up to something bigger in the future.

"I grew up with a very supportive family, and I have a little one," Taylor told me. "I want Erie to be a better place for her."

In 2018, Taylor, a New Castle native who landed in Erie to study at PennWest Edinboro (then Edinboro University), was thinking of moving. Instead, with that idea percolating, she dug in and stayed.

"My husband and I decided we were going to stay here, and my thing was, I'm going to stay here, I'm going to have a child here — a little brown girl. I have to make sure that area is a better place for her."

For Taylor, that sense of family extends to Erie's Black Wall Street.

"With EBWS, I look at everybody that we work with and our community as family," Taylor told me. "Yes, we have disagreements, and we don't see eye to eye on certain things sometimes, but the common goal at the end of the day is love. And just to see the impact that EBWS has had on my four-year-old in just a short amount of time — she is already a master at saving money, and she is very confident and bold and sure of who she is. And she knows who different business owners are."

A four-year-old little girl modeling a lesson capable of being learned by all, thanks to the four-year-old nonprofit, Erie's Black Wall Street, and all it brings to the community and beyond as it continues to rise.

Remember Erie's Black Wall Street on Erie Gives Day by visiting [eriegives.org/organizations/eries-black-wall-street](http://eriegives.org/organizations/eries-black-wall-street)

August is National Black Business Month. Celebrating National Black Business Month, Erie's Black Wall Street is partnering with the Jefferson Educational Society to host two events on Aug. 8 and 19. For more information, visit either organization's websites.

To learn more about Erie's Black Wall Street mission and impact, visit [EriesBlackWallStreet.org](http://EriesBlackWallStreet.org), and download the EBWS app.

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



Steph Montgomery

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## Erie Arts and Culture: A Transformative Year

Director reflects on the organization's changes, growth, and future

By: Anne O'Dell, executive director, Erie Arts and Culture

The past year has been transformative for Erie Arts and Culture (EAC). The EAC team finds the organization set on a renewed course of elevating, inspiring, and connecting artists and organizations throughout Northwestern Pennsylvania.

Did you know EAC serves six counties in Northwestern Pennsylvania through its partnership with the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (PCA)? Of 14 partners in Pennsylvania, EAC is the only one to partner with the Council for all three of its program areas: Arts in Education, Pennsylvania Partners in the Arts, and Folk and Traditional Arts. You can find out more about these programs and the grants and artist residencies they fund on EAC's new website.

When you visit the new website, you will find a refreshed brand and clarity in programming and resources that EAC provides, including grants for individual artists and arts organizations. You will also see an events calendar, featuring the upcoming Ethnic Food Market Tours, Creative Crowd net-

Arts Council; and to be a leader in state policy programs and initiatives.

Because of the PCA partnerships, EAC is regarded by people and organizations in Northwestern Pennsylvania as a leader in arts and culture. We will be fully stepping into that role while remaining firmly anchored in the Erie community.

Over the course of the next three years, the strategic plan calls for the creation of a full-time folk and traditional arts program officer position. Kelly Armor, our folk art director, has created a strong foundation for supporting living cultural heritage, and as she prepares to retire in the next five years, we are committed to honoring her legacy. The new position will continue Kelly's work done for the PCA Folk and Traditional Arts Partnership, as well as tell Erie's story through folk and humanities programs.

Is purchasing office space or a building to repurpose into a space that serves artists and the community feasible? What does a financially sustainable public art program that is manageable for EAC staff look like? How will EAC participate in public art? These

**Erie Arts and Culture creates a future where the arts are the heartbeat of every community in Northwestern Pennsylvania. We serve as a beacon of cultural vibrancy and economic growth. As stewards of this vision, we support individuals and organizations in creating the vibrant lives, communities, and businesses they envision.**

working events, and Working Artist 101 workshops.

In addition to a refreshed brand, I am excited to share that EAC now has an action-based strategic plan. Over the last year, the EAC team, board, and stakeholders contributed to this plan and the resulting document includes program, development, and marketing plans to increase our service levels and re-engage us with supporters and stakeholders.

The plan has three goals for the next three years: to sustain and enhance fiscal health and operations; to fulfill our role as Northwestern Pennsylvania's

are key questions we will explore in the coming years.

Many thanks to Strategy Solutions for their work on the plan.

I am pleased to share that EAC now has a finance policy that includes a donor bill of rights and ethical standards for how contributions are managed and used in support of EAC programs. This policy was a major initiative that was identified in this year's financial audit. I am pleased that this guiding document clearly articulates how finances are managed and maintained in the organization. It can be found on our new website.

ANNA HARTVIGSON



Executive director of Erie Arts and Culture Anne O'Dell fills us in on some of the changes the organization has made over the past year including an office move to the historic Cashier's House, the implementation of events like the Ethnic Food Market Tours, Creative Crowd networking events, and Working Artist 101 workshops, as well as continued individual support for artists in the Northwestern Pennsylvania region.

I also want to thank the Sisters of St. Mary's School where EAC's offices have been located for several years, as well as the wonderful people who have been our neighbors in the building.

As EAC charted its next chapter, we found we needed a more accessible space where the community can easily enter our offices and meet with our team. EAC now has a new home in the Cashier's House on State Street. We have plans to use the second and third floors of the building for office space, as well as a welcoming space for people to meet with our team and access resources we provide.

While our new offices will welcome the community and keep us anchored in Erie, EAC's team will increase our presence in the six counties we serve. We will strengthen the networks of arts and culture organizations and artists that are an essential part of NW-PA's vibrancy.

Erie Arts and Culture creates a future where the arts are the heartbeat of ev-

ery community in Northwestern Pennsylvania. We serve as a beacon of cultural vibrancy and economic growth. As stewards of this vision, we support individuals and organizations in creating the vibrant lives, communities, and businesses they envision. Through our leadership, we catalyze change, foster inclusivity, and drive development, ensuring the arts continually reflect, enrich, and inspire our evolving region. We look forward to continuing the many partnerships that support us on this journey.

*Erie Arts and Culture would love for you to donate to their continued efforts to support artists in our region on Erie Gives Day. You can donate on Aug.13 at [eriegives.org/organizations/erie-arts-and-culture](http://eriegives.org/organizations/erie-arts-and-culture)*

*Visit Erie Arts and Culture's new website at [erieartsandculture.org](http://erieartsandculture.org)*

*Anne O'Dell can be reached at [anne@erieartsandculture.org](mailto:anne@erieartsandculture.org)*



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## Erie Regional Producers Sow Seeds for Future Success During USDA Visits

Food insecurity best addressed on a local level

By: Chloe Forbes

A divided nation and a divided Congress came together in 1862 under Abraham Lincoln to establish the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Seven weeks later, Lincoln signed the Morrill Land Grant Act into law. This act gave states public lands to sell or use for profit with proceeds used to build agricultural and technical colleges.

In the current era of a polarized political landscape, it seems fitting that regional citizens met with the USDA on the Penn State Behrend campus — well-known for its contributions to the agricultural community — to talk about how federal programs are helping and where they're falling short.

On April 23, USDA Deputy Secretary Xochitl Torres Small and Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding held a roundtable discussion with local producers to educate the community on initiatives available through the Biden administration and receive feedback.

With small rural and urban farmers sitting at the table, one thing was clear: federal support needs to include large and small-scale farms and bridge the disconnect between urban and rural operations to create a more sustainable food system that complements the state legislature.

Congress passed a Farm Bill extension in November 2023, which gives Congress an additional 10 months to pass a new Farm Bill for President Joe Biden to sign into law.

Stephanie Ciner, owner of Wild Field Urban Farm, said she has benefited greatly from USDA funds but sees the present moment as an opportunity to foster growth. "I think the USDA is in a unique position now to hopefully become more of a leader," Ciner said during the panel.

The lower east-side urban farmer first fell in love with growing when she lived in Philadelphia, 10 years ago. "Someone gave me a plant and I planted it in the ground — it transformed my life," she said. From there, Ciner participated in a farm apprenticeship to develop the skills and interest needed to sustain her own small farm.

With an urban farm, she has the potential to increase public awareness



With more funding made available by the Biden administration through a Farm Bill extension in November of 2023, the USDA is acknowledging the gaps that pushed the focus of agriculture in this country towards large-scale, industrialized farms and is now making strides to include smaller farming initiatives at the table.

surrounding how ecosystem changes affect local producers, in addition to the work that goes into growing fresh food. Situated in the city, residents get to see farming practiced firsthand on their daily commutes.

Ciner said USDA funds benefited her journey as a young farmer, but where opportunities fall short is supporting small businesses that farmers like her create.

In the '70s, the USDA became concerned that it may not have enough food supply to meet demand, so it began offering incentives that prioritized efficiency and high-volume production. Torres noted that there are fewer farmers and less farmland, but producers are expected to produce more food than ever. Torres acknowledged that it's challenging for small-scale producers to navigate a system set up for big farms. She touched on some of the supports the USDA hopes to build on.

Those include resources to expand the production of value-added products, such as farming grapes to create wine, jelly, juice, and more; ecosystem services, like support for pollinator upkeep and healthy soil practices that fight climate change and drive produc-

tivity, agritourism, local food procurement, and renewable energy investments.

Other conversations centered around providing more technical assistance for farmers so they have sustainable skills to self-advocate and access resources. The Biden Administration has also invested more than \$174 million through the Fertilizer Production Expansion Program to support 42 projects nationwide to boost domestic fertilization production in an effort to create fruitful and bountiful pastures for producers.

Those programs support existing resources offered through the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, such as the state's value-added product research grants.

Maximizing small producers' profits requires a sustainable and reliable market, which multiple roundtable members identified as an area of improvement. Kristen Weeks, owner of Glow and Grow Urban Collective in Erie, expressed discontent with the USDA's exclusionary nature. She finds it beyond her ability and capacity to meet the rigorous requirements in areas like bookkeeping that the USDA re-

quires its applicants to report.

Torres said the team at USDA is turning a new leaf and wants to cater to all producers, as well as to create a viable and consistent market for those producers to access.

An example of how this is at play on a growing level in Erie County is the Edinboro Market. Marti Martz, Edinboro Market co-founder and executive director, spoke about the expansion Edinboro Market will soon undergo.

The Market has served as a fresh food incubator since 2017 and provides yearlong access to fresh local food that makes it more accessible for low-income and low-access communities while driving business for small rural and urban farmers. Since 2017, the Market has sold over \$1.35 million in food and food-related products from 75 small-scale farms and producers within a 100-mile radius surrounding Edinboro. The business follows a 75/25 split model with producers, which means the Market's business has put over a million dollars back into the community.

The Market is now expanding to a vacant building a block away from its current location in downtown Edinboro,



and it will include a cafe. The expanded space in the market will augment the retail supply chain capacity. Federal investments in the project will provide over \$663,000 and help with building renovations, the purchase of classroom media equipment, and two years of educational programming. This programming will include agricultural training, business development, cooking and gardening, and more.

Redding noted that Edinboro Market could be a convener between those interested in producing food and existing nearby farms and gardens to foster relationships and possibly apprenticeships.

Celeste Makay, advocacy coordinator at Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania, said creating more small farms, local markets, and connections would promote cross-market collaboration. As a result, it could increase efficiency and sustainability in food systems, especially when complemented by measures that make it easier for producers to donate and sell their products. The more of their yield farmers sell helps reduce food waste and maximize economic benefits while cutting down on food insecurity.

As those supports take form, Pennsylvania Certified Organic is behind the scenes to ensure farmers get proper compensation and recognition to help build on their quality products. Pennsylvania Certified Organic is a USDA-accredited organic certifying agency. Diane Kobus, executive director of Pennsylvania Certified Organic, heads regional initiatives. Being certified as organic opens doors to new markets, results in better seller profit, and ad-

ditional funding and technical assistance. In just over a year, Kobus said the organization has had 154 regional mentees sign up for organic transition as well as 46 organizations providing outreach and technical support, and nine food hubs getting ready to aggregate and distribute fresh organic food.

This transition is meant to be a foundation for economic prosperity and community well-being. "Organic is not grown in wealthy communities. It builds wealth in communities," Kobus remarked.

As inflation increased over the past couple of years, U.S. citizens certainly felt the pinch. Consumers may shy away from spending extra money to get organic products, which is where resources like the Second Harvest Food Bank come into play.

At Second Harvest, Makay said they rely heavily on The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which are USDA programs meant to address food insecurity. Food insecurity is a lack of regular access to safe and nutritious food for a healthy life, whether due to availability or lack of resources to attain that food, like money.

"At Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania, we've experienced a 79 percent increase in food cost alone since fiscal year 2020, and this came at a time when we've dramatically increased the amount of fresh produce, protein, and dairy products we're providing to northwest Pennsylvania communities," Makay said.

The food bank and its partner hun-



Recently the USDA Deputy Secretary and Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture held a roundtable discussion with local farmers to discuss relevant initiatives by the Biden administration. Pictured (left to right) are Stephanie Ciner of Wildfield Urban Farm, USDA Deputy Secretary Xochitl Torres Small, PA Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding, and Kristen Weeks of Grow and Glow Collective.

ger-relief organizations saw an overall increase of 33 percent in attendance at food distributions in 2023 compared to 2022.

"At the same time, the cost of purchasing, storing, and distributing food for our food bank and network partners has increased dramatically, straining our limited resources," she said. "Many of the communities we serve are in rural areas where infrastructure, job opportunities, and access to local grocery options are limited. These factors contribute to hunger in rural communities and, for the food bank, even higher costs for storing and transporting food."

For the Food Bank, that means investing in TEFAP, SNAP, and CSFP would benefit the local communities it serves.

The USDA not only needs to provide stronger resources to small-scale producers but also to the markets and

organizations that enable the distribution of that food into communities.

As time ticks down for Congress to pass a federal Farm Bill, Redding expressed his confidence in the Biden Administration to sign a Farm Bill with historic agricultural investments, and he said the state will work to leverage and complement that bill.

"I'm excited about what's possible," Redding said. I'm excited about the work ... the entire team is doing to change both the perceptions about what we do in agriculture, the power of being in an industry that changes lives, and also that partnership with many people who believe in their community and this state."

*Chloe Forbes is a local journalist who feeds her sugar addiction with local honey and can be found at farmers markets next to the nearest freshly-baked zucchini bread. Reach her at [chloeforbes14@gmail.com](mailto:chloeforbes14@gmail.com).*



## Erie County Human Relations Commission

The Erie County Human Relations Commission (ECHRC) works to eliminate discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations through identification, consultation, and investigation of complaints.

- The ECHRC provides a system of equal justice for employer–employee, landlord–tenant, business–patron, and lending institution–homebuyer.

ECHRC's Ordinance makes it unlawful to discriminate against protected classes that include:

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- **NWPA Beehive Network**, with ECGRA support and matching funds from the Friends, offers a chance to create and nurture a business idea.
- **Erie Makes** is a weeklong celebration of maker skills and local artists with fun, all-ages programming.
- The **Career Online High School** offers an opportunity to gain a high school diploma needed for career development and further education.
- **HistERIE Week** with dozens of programs, help people connect to regional history and genealogy.
- **Small Business Symposium** provides vital information on how to start a small business including finances, accounting, intellectual property, and how to get a small business loan.
- **Computer, Genealogy, Yoga and Craft** Classes
- **Book Clubs** and the **Summer Reading** Program

## YOUTH PROGRAMS

- **STEAM** (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) Programs
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- **Storytimes** and **craft** programs
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- **Teen Advisory Board** and other activities offered at the **Teen Space**
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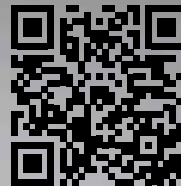
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# Erie Reader Gives on Erie Gives Day 2024

## The power of collective giving

By: Erie Reader Staff

It's that time of year again. The time when the Erie community bands together to raise significant and much-needed funds for some of our most-loved and appreciated nonprofit organizations. So many nonprofits rely on Erie Gives Day as their main fundraising outlet, and the people of Erie never let them down. According to Erin Fessler, vice president of marketing and community/government relations for the Erie Community Foundation (ECF), the amount of giving is staggering, "Erie Gives will be celebrating 14 years of giving this year. Since inception, the event has raised over \$56.6 million for local nonprofits. Last August, the event broke all records with an impressive \$8.2 million."

Any donation of \$25 or more made to any participating nonprofit during Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 13, either through their website or via check dropped off at the Erie Community Foundation offices at 459 W. Sixth St., will receive a boost from the Erie Gives Bonus Bucks Pool, which means your chosen nonprofit(s) gets even more cash to improve their organizations.

And the giving keeps on getting better. The folks at the ECF have been working hard all year long to improve and streamline Erie Gives 2024 and they're hoping for their biggest year yet. They've implemented a number of upgrades and changes to raise awareness which (hopefully) translates to raising donations. Fessler explains, "Erie Gives is a community-spirited event like no other. Our corporate sponsors provide the \$480,000 Bonus Bucks pro-rated match pool, our Community Partners provide \$500 hourly grants which we share via Facebook Live, and on local television, radio, and newspaper." They've also partnered with Country Fair and since April, their Charity Pumps have raised over \$65,000 so far for Erie Gives and are open until Aug. 13. All that funding will be equally distributed amongst the participating nonprofits.

She continues, "But truly, Erie Gives is in the hands of the donors. Donors can choose what cause they want to support. We say, 'Everyone can be a philanthropist with a gift of just \$25 or more because it all adds up!' I call that the power of collective giving."

That power will be harnessed for one day only: Tuesday, Aug. 13, so mark your calendars. ECF has improved the process this year by extending their hours of giving — the Erie Gives website will be open for donations from midnight to midnight, while the ECF and Nonprofit Partnership staff will provide phone support, as always, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

"From housing the unhoused, feeding our hungry neighbors, educating our young, assisting our seniors, sheltering lost animals or improving our quality of life through arts and culture — Erie Gives supports a variety of causes," Fessler reflects. "And what is even more valuable than the dollars raised are the new donor relationships built. Erie Gives introduces so many



The Erie Community Foundation launches their 14th annual Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 13. After rebranding, upgrading, expanding, and streamlining the donation process, the group is hoping to surpass their record \$8.2 million raised last year.

nonprofits to donors and then donors can choose what speaks to their heart, to their mission."

To find the nonprofit that speaks to your heart, visit [ErieGives.org](http://ErieGives.org) on Tuesday, Aug. 13 and use the search bar to find their individual page to donate \$25 or more. Or you can drop off a check to the Erie Community Foundation by Aug. 9, 459 W. Sixth St. or call (814) 454-0843.

### Our Nonprofit Picks

Each year, the writers, editors, and artists of the Erie Reader share those nonprofits that are most important to us — this diverse list represents all the perspectives of our staff as well as the breadth of services that charitable organizations provide to our community. We're happy to shine our individual spotlights on a few of them. If you're undecided about which nonprofits to toss some cash to this Erie Gives Day, perhaps draw inspiration from the following list. Happy giving, Erie!

*Nonprofits are listed alphabetically by donor's last name*

#### Afghan Community of Erie, PA

**Who's giving:** Jonathan Burdick, Writer

**Who they are:** Established in 2022, the Afghan Community of Erie, PA serves Erie's 130 Afghan families, most having arrived following the evacuation of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2021. As their lives were in danger due to their association with American soldiers, many of these families arrived stateside after fleeing with little more than the clothes on their back.

With the challenges of living in a new environment with a different culture, language, and foods, the families bonded together to form this organization to offer one another "a sense of home, support, and closure," the first of its kind in Pennsylvania.

**Why I'm giving:** This organization provides essential services to these 130 families across Erie. Their community center has four overarching goals to support and assist families new to the states: cultural integration, trauma healing, empowerment, and economic stability. The organization offers resources, programs, job training, support services, and more to help them adapt to life in the United States while also creating a safe environment where they can share experiences, support one another, and contribute to the Erie community.

**Jonathan previously gave to:** International Institute, USCRI Erie, Burleigh Legacy Alliance

#### U. S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants-USCRI

**Who's giving:** Edwina Capozziello, Writer

**Who they are:** Since 1919 (formerly as the International Institute of Erie) they have helped newly arrived refugees with a whole host of services including housing, cultural orientation, school enrollment, initial health appointments and employment prep/placement.

**Why I'm giving:** I used to live near the USCRI office and met many friendly, humble, and resilient people. This was especially true during a time when so many Syrian refugees were seeking a safe haven. My heart really went out to both the people who were forced to leave their homelands and the people who were here



to receive and help them.

**Bonus:** Consider giving to any of the following organizations that aid new American immigrants or refugees: MCRC — Multicultural Community Resource Center, Multi-Cultural Health Evaluation Delivery System, Inc. (MHEDS), or the Sisters of Mercy, House of Mercy

**Goodell Gardens & Homestead**

**Who's giving:** Chloe Forbes, Writer

**Who they are:** Goodell Gardens & Homestead is an education-oriented nonprofit botanical garden and arboretum in Edinboro. It was created on the farmstead property owned by the Goodell family since 1876. The garden has evolved and been maintained according to sisters Carrie and Margaret's wishes that it remain a public garden rooted in historical significance. From a horticultural perspective, the 78-acre garden is significant in its diversity of cultivated plant species along with heirloom gardening.

**Why I'm giving:** As a current resident of Edinboro, this regional asset is right in my backyard, and I find myself there quite a bit, enjoying Sunday morning yoga, learning about pollinators, and listening to live jazz as the sun sets. From applicable lectures to herb-centric events, it's a breath of fresh air — literally — in the middle of a seemingly non-stop world, and I wish to keep its legacy going by supporting the volunteers, staff, and upkeep of grounds. It's essential to care for things that naturally take care of us.

**Erie Cancer Wellness Center**

**Who's giving:** Brian Graham, Co-Editor-In-Chief

**Who they are:** The Erie Cancer Wellness Center offers free programs and services designed to help individuals and families facing cancer. They believe that healing involves more than just medical treatment, and their goal is to provide non-medical support that addresses the whole person — body, mind, and spirit. They strive to create a compassionate and respectful environment where individuals and families can find

hope, healing, and the resources they need to navigate their cancer journey.

**Why I'm giving:** Cancer is a prevalent disease, affecting nearly 40 percent of all Americans and a majority of families at some point. Despite this ubiquity, a cancer diagnosis can be a devastating and shocking event, upending the lives of both the person diagnosed and their families. The challenges of medical care, emotional turmoil, and maintaining daily life can be overwhelming. The Erie Cancer Wellness Center offers essential support services to help ease this burden. Through programs like massage, Reiki, gentle yoga, and support groups, the center focuses on aspects of well-being often overlooked by traditional medical treatment.

**Brian previously gave to:** United Way Imagination Library, Friends of the Erie County Library, Meals on Wheels, Hooked on Books, Because You Care, YMCA of Greater Erie

**Erie Yacht Club Foundation**

**Who's giving:** Jessica Hunter, Media Editor and Photographer

**Who they are:** The Erie Yacht Club Foundation was established to support philanthropic maritime-related programs. They strive to enhance the Erie community by advancing maritime education, promoting youth and intercollegiate sailing competition, and expanding opportunities in boating. The foundation works with the United Way to support the greater maritime ecosystem. By bringing boating experience to underserved youth, as well as education programs to the library, maritime museums, and regional science consortium.

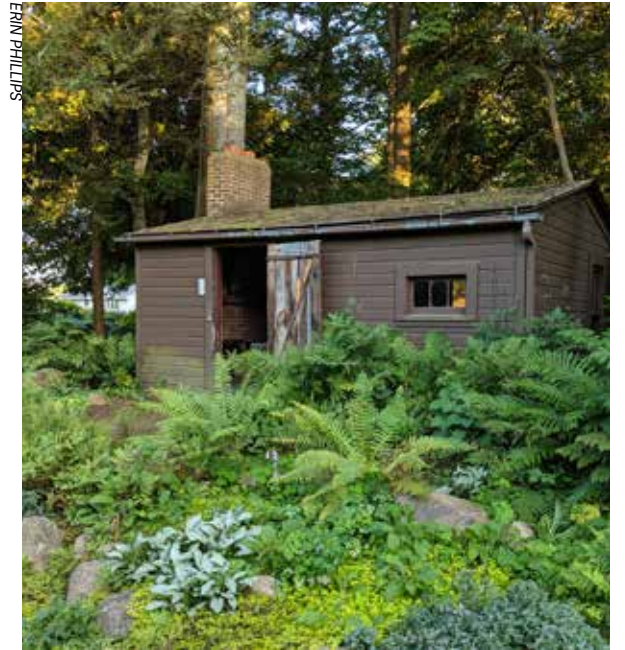
**Why I'm giving:** Both of my children have had the opportunity to join the Reyburn Sailing School program during our beautiful summers on Lake Erie. Living on a Great Lake has so many advantages. Giving children access to a maritime experience will create a lifelong passion, excitement, and skill playing a formative role in personal development as well as water safety. Sailing is truly a sport that can be enjoyed by all. Teaching a child to sail helps them acquire skills that will assist them as they navigate their way in the world. Learning to sail develops independence and confidence. When a child sails, they realize that all decisions have consequences, and they are responsible for the result.

**Jessica previously gave to:** Presque Isle Partnership, Lake Erie Region Conservancy, Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, NAMI of Erie County, and the Erie Humane Society

**Erie Bird Observatory**

**Who's Giving:** Erin Phillips, Managing Editor

**Who they are:** The mission of the Erie Bird Observatory is "to foster enthusiasm for birds and conservation through ornithological research and public engagement." Their reach in the community grows each year and their work is key in the conservation of habitat and in the documentation and public outreach about our native land, shore, and migratory bird species. Their outreach includes bird banding, habitat conservation, educational programming including tours, walks, and talks, as well as their volunteer-run Bird-



Contributing writer Chloe Forbes is choosing to give to Goodell Gardens and Homestead this Erie Gives Day – she appreciates the proximity and the programming of the facility and hopes the legacy of the Goodell sisters lives on for generations.

Safe Erie initiative which helps monitor and prevent bird deaths from window collisions.

**Why I'm giving:** Have you seen the meme? The one that says: One day you're young and carefree; the next you're like, "Is that a tufted titmouse at my birdfeeder??" That's me. And as a result, my entire family. Over the past few years, we've gotten onto the complete fascination/obsession that is birdwatching, which has been fostered by the work of the Erie Bird Observatory.

While birds are fascinating, beautiful, and exciting to see in the wild, they're also key to the health of our ecosystem and perform valuable functions like pest control, pollination, seed dispersal, and scavenging. As bird populations decline, humans will in turn. The work of the Erie Bird Observatory is key in their local conservation. Our family has learned so much from their bird banding sessions (which are free and open to the public during migratory seasons) and guided hikes at Gull Point and Thompson's Circle. The organization has given our family yet another reason to appreciate the bounty of Presque Isle State Park and we're happy to donate to EBO this Erie Gives Day.

**Bonus:** Consider donating to other local native species conservation organizations like Presque Isle Audubon Society, Asbury Woods Partnership, The Regional Science Consortium, or Tamarack Wildlife Center.

**Erin previously gave to:** Friends of the Erie County Library, Erie Arts & Culture, Asbury Woods, and Our West Bayfront

**Compton's Table**

**Who's giving:** Dan Schank, Writer

**Who they are:** An Erie-based non-profit that uses a community health model to provide safe spaces to queer and gender non-conforming people. The organization offers our LGBTQIA+ community an array of resources, including personal counseling, career development advice, free gender-affirming clothing, and networking opportunities.



Managing Editor Erin Phillips is choosing to donate to the Erie Bird Observatory this Erie Gives Day – her family has attended many programs initiated by the local nonprofit and appreciates the knowledge, enthusiasm, and important conservation efforts of the group.



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ERIN PHILLIPS



Compton's Table, located within the Central Outreach building at 31st and State streets, is a local nonprofit group helping to support our local LGBTQIA+ and gender nonconforming population through counseling, career development, networking opportunities, and positive outreach.

**Why I'm giving:** In January of 2023, former president (and, as I type this, presidential frontrunner) Donald Trump made clear his plans for the transgender community if re-elected in November. In a video posted to his Truth Social platform, he pledged to use an executive order to end all federal programming "that promotes the concept of sex and gender transition at any age." He also vowed to revoke all of the Biden administration's policies regarding gender-affirming care and to propose legislation requiring the U.S. government to recognize only two genders (assigned at birth). Finally, he promised to create a private "right of action" through which any doctor who provides gender-affirming care to a minor could be sued for doing so.

I'm giving to Compton's Table because I want to stand up to this kind of cruel bullying. Their work exemplifies what is best about our community, and I'm worried about the systemic threats they are facing.

**Dan previously gave to:** NWPA Pride Alliance, Inc., The Erie County Community College of PA, and The

Multicultural Community Resource Center (MCRC)

**Erie Center for Arts & Technology (ECAT)**

**Who's giving:** Matt Swansager, Copy Editor

**Who they are:** Located in the former Wayne Middle School on Erie's lower east side, the Erie Center for Arts & Technology (ECAT) comprises more than 80,000 square feet of studio, conference, and activity spaces, hosting adult job training, creative youth programs, and entrepreneurial initiatives aimed to uplift and educate Erieites of all ages — especially those with limited means.

**Why I'm giving:** I became acquainted with ECAT in 2022 while working on a story about the ErieMade Business Academy (an incubator program geared toward historically disenfranchised populations) and was immediately impressed with the facility and the scope of the organization's outreach. As a content director with Epic Web Studios, I've also had the opportunity to contribute to several projects through

like-minded ECAT collaborators such as Bridgeway Capital, helping to bring entrepreneurial aspirations to fruition. Inertia is the biggest hurdle to achievement, so I appreciate ECAT's mission to help others get things moving.

**Matt previously gave to:** Erie Arts & Music Festival (d/b/a Erie Blues & Jazz Festival), Erie Food Rescue, The Performing Artists Collective Alliance (PACA), Erie Together, Bayfront Maritime Center, Asbury Woods, and The Tamarack Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center

**Presque Isle Partnership**

**Who's giving:** Adam Welsh, Co-Editor-In-Chief

**Who they are:** Founded exactly 30 years ago, the Presque Isle Partnership is an official nonprofit partner of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). Their job is to generate private support and build strategic partnerships to serve the growing needs of Presque Isle State Park and its 4+ million annual visitors. Basically, their focus is on making Presque Isle the best park it can be, and ensuring that our experiences are enjoyable throughout all four seasons.

**Why I'm giving:** Like many in the Gem City, I view Presque Isle as our community's crown jewel. As I cycled around the newly repaved bike path through the very well-attended events of Discover Presque Isle a couple weeks ago, I was once again struck by a sense of intense gratitude for the fact that we have this amazing natural resource (and reason alone for visitors to plan a trip to Erie) right here at our disposal. And more than that, thankful to the folks who are tasked with providing the accessibility, amenities, safety, historical preservation, and education at the park. Here's to the next 30 years of keeping Presque Isle beautiful.

**Adam previously gave to:** Career and Dreams, Erie Women's Fund, Film Society of Northwest Pennsylvania, Lake Erie Region Conservancy, LifeThruMusic, and the Jefferson Educational Society

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Photo: Patrick Grab

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Your donation would be very helpful – and greatly appreciated. Become a partner with the Presque Isle Partnership! With your help, we will continue to grow and provide much-needed support to serve Presque Isle.

Keep in mind that there are other ways to help the park. We rely on volunteers throughout the year to help us get work done. If you're interested in volunteering, visit our website.

All proceeds from Erie Gives Day and our special events benefit the Partnership's mission to better your experience at Presque Isle by developing,

funding, and implementing projects and programs on the park while protecting the natural environment.

Your donation through Erie Gives can help the Partnership ensure that public spaces, public safety, historical sites, concerts, festivals, athletic events, and educational programs continue to enhance how we enjoy our area's greatest natural gift.

The Presque Isle Partnership has been helping the park for 30 years by contributing needed reforestation, new lifeguard public safety equipment, improved beach accessibility, and more. We look forward to our next 30 years! To find out who we are and what we do, visit us online at [discoverpi.org](http://discoverpi.org).

**Please remember us on Erie Gives Day on August 13.**



Join the efforts of our 2024 Sponsors and support the Partnership!





# Kayla McBride: Hungry, Humble, and Thankful... But Never Satisfied

WNBA All-Star and Erie basketball great keeps working

By: Jonathan Burdick

This summer, Erie native and Minnesota Lynx guard Kayla McBride made her fourth appearance in the WNBA All-Star Game. Erie Times-News sports writer Tom Reisenweber in 2019 had already noted that McBride had “put together one of the greatest basketball careers in Erie history.” With each passing season, she *continues* to add to that legacy.

McBride is one of the WNBA’s “most efficient scorers” and “one of the league’s deadliest jumpshooters,” SB Nation recently published. Minneapolis-based journalist Terry Horstman clearly agrees, writing in July, “McBride is playing some of the best basketball of her career.”

“I know this league,” McBride, now in her 11th season as a pro, told Minnesota’s Star Tribune. “I have to bring the energy and experience. We have people who want to prove themselves. And I want to help.”

*I want to help.* For Kayla McBride, that’s always been more than merely a mantra.

## The Villa Maria Victors

It was the midpoint of the 2006-2007 high school basketball season. The Girard Yellowjackets were leading the region, but a win by Erie’s Villa Maria Victors would tie it up. The two rivals had been battling it out for four quarters in front of hundreds of spectators on Girard’s home turf.

It was a low-scoring, sloppy game. As was often the case, Villa Maria had staged a second-half comeback. The game was tied. Now with only seconds remaining on the clock, they had possession of the ball. The timer ticked towards zero as a potential game-winning shot sailed over the rim. It landed in the hands of a 14-year-old freshman guard, Kayla McBride. She put it back up. Time expired as the ball went in. The Victors were victorious.

“It was so exciting,” McBride, shedding “tears of joy,” told Erie Times-News sports reporter Joe Mattis. “That’s the first time something like that ever happened to me.” It wouldn’t be the last.

The regular season culminated in a dramatic rematch against Girard at Gannon University’s Hammermill Center. Villa Maria won again to take the region outright. Their win streak continued to the District 10 Class AA championship where they defeated Lakeview at Edinboro University’s McComb Fieldhouse.

Reporter Ron Leonardi described them as a well-balanced, deep-benched, defense-first team that knew how to disrupt an opponent’s comfort zone. Their win streak continued into the state playoffs all the way to the PIAA state championship game against the undefeated York Catholic. While they lost, being second in the state with region and district titles was an exceptional achievement.

The team retained three starters the following season, along with a sophomore McBride and a promis-

KAYLA MCBRIDE MEDIA



An alum of Villa Maria Academy in Erie, Kayla McBride has gone on to represent her hometown as a key team player at Notre Dame University and ultimately the WNBA for the Minnesota Lynx, where she recently made her fourth appearance in their All-Star game.

ing transfer. The team was off to a solid start when senior and team captain Brittany Wilwohl went out with an elbow injury in mid-January. She’d miss the next eight games while the rest worked strenuously to keep up their momentum. They succeeded.

“Just a sophomore, Villa Maria basketball player Kayla McBride seems to have unlimited potential,” printed the Erie Times-News, adding that she was “a pure treat to watch.” Villa Maria head coach Scott Dibble described her as “team-oriented and a tremendous player.” The 5’11” McBride, tall for a guard in the region, was gaining a reputation for her fearlessness, meticulous mid-range jump shots, and “piercing, shifty drives” to the bucket.

“If she plays as hard as she can,” Dibble stressed, “I don’t think anyone can hang with her.”

McBride always found a way to shift the conversation to the team. “Our whole team has been working really, really hard on defense,” she noted in a post-game interview. “It was a really good team effort.”

Wilwohl returned from her injury in February as they clinched the Region 2 title and went on to *again* win the District 10 championship a few weeks later against Girard. But their season came to an early end in the state playoffs with a surprise 50-45 loss to Johnstown’s Bishop McCort High School.

Falling short of a state championship two years in a row was motivating. McBride spent the summer playing with the Erie Irish club team where she demonstrated her “run-and-gun style,” almost streetball-like at times, which kept “defense[s] guessing almost every time she touched the ball.” They played in Chicago and Washington, D.C., bringing her attention outside of Erie County. ESPN soon ranked her nationally

as a top 10 guard in her graduating class. Numerous NCAA Division I schools began expressing interest in her. Even though she planned on waiting until *after* junior year to make any verbal commitments, a single visit to Notre Dame changed that.

“When I stepped on campus as a 16-year-old, it was just this feeling, almost like butterflies,” McBride reflected in 2020. She very quickly informed legendary Notre Dame coach Muffet McGraw that she planned to join the Fighting Irish in two years. “I knew I found the right college for me — one that went beyond basketball and one renowned for academics,” McBride said at the time. “It’s overwhelming ... I’m just trying to take it all in right now.”

McGraw, who coached Notre Dame from 1987 to 2020, led the team to nine Final Four appearances with two national championships throughout her career. She tells me that she immediately connected with McBride. Earlier in her coaching career, it was mostly about what the players could do *on* the court, but in her later years, she found there needed to be more than that.

“I really cared more about *them*, their competitive drive, their work ethic, how coachable they were going to be,” says McGraw. “Along with [Kayla having] all of those things, I just loved talking to her. I just felt like I had a connection with her. I think being from Erie, her family was so important to her, and she was somebody who felt like she had something to prove, something that she *wanted* to prove. She had that drive to be great.”

McBride still had two more high school seasons left though and, now a junior, she and her teammates would demonstrate that competitive drive. As the



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KAYLA MCBRIDE MEDIA



On a team that eventually swept the region, Kayla McBride got this taste of victory as she helped lead the Villa Victors. Her team-first attitude and humble confidence has made her a valuable asset to the many teams she has helped towards success over the years.

season began, she was asked about her “ultimate sports fantasy.” It wasn’t about breaking school records or playing in the WNBA. It was about winning a state championship. It was about the team.

“The Notre Dame-bound junior could score 40 on any given night if she wanted to, but always seems to find the open teammate,” wrote Tom Reisenweber that season. Her unselfishness on the court was highlighted often. Even on the night she crossed 1,000 career points, she said that it was nice, but she’d take a state championship over it any day.

This team understood their respective roles — and while they clearly knew how to get the ball through the hoop, they also continued to dominate teams de-

fensively, many times keeping their opponents under 30 points. “When we play as a team,” said McBride after a win, “we can do anything.” And, indeed, they did. One could write a book about these two seasons, but the short of it: they won the state championship against York Catholic.

Then they won it *again* the next year.

On top of her personal accomplishments, in McBride’s four years playing for the Villa Maria Victors, the team had a remarkable 106-15 record.

**Putting the Work In**

Of course, Kayla McBride’s story starts long before high school. The daughter of LaMont and LuAnn

McBride and the oldest of four, she fell in love with the game very young, spending countless days, basketball in hand, with her father who refereed and worked summer basketball camps. As she got older and better at handling the ball, she’d study DVDs of Michael Jordan highlight reels and by age 12, she was playing pickup games at Erie’s Burton Park. She was often the only girl present. She worked relentlessly to be taken seriously, focusing on her crossovers and pull-up jumpshot. “You can’t back down,” she later reflected on these games. She wanted to be known there by her name and not just “the girl on the court.”

“I just loved the game,” McBride later said. “I loved the feeling of the ball going through the net.”

Then there was the Charlie Ward basketball camp. Around the same time she started playing pickup games, her father was coaching at the all-boys camp in Erie led by Ward, point guard for the New York Knicks. She was permitted to participate and soon, McBride had opportunities to work directly with Ward.

“I remember her vividly,” Ward shares with me. “She was definitely a gifted athlete. She was very similar to myself. When I was a little kid, I used to follow my dad around... and there she was, dribbling the basketball.” It was also confirmation to McBride that she *could* play this game. Charlie Ward and his camp were so influential that she wears his jersey number, 21, on her uniform to this day.

Next, she headed to play for NCAA Division I Notre Dame.

“She was so humble,” reflects Coach McGraw. “I would always tell players, we can help you, but you have to want it too. And boy, Kayla wanted to be so good and she was never afraid to put the work in.”

McBride started off the season with solid stats: averaging 8.7 points per game making 55.7 percent of her shots. There were challenges though and her academics suffered, which sidelined her for the second half of the season. By her own account, it was a low point, and in recent years, she’s been open about her

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At 32 years old, McBride is now a key player for the WNBA team, the Minnesota Lynx, where she has transformed into one of the most prolific three-point shooters in the league.

mental health struggles since childhood battling anxiety and self-doubt.

At the season's end, she had a choice to make.

"She had tremendous mental toughness," McGraw says. McBride, she remembers, spent the entire off-season in the gym. "She came back a much better player. I think that's something the other players really respected, how she responded to adversity."

McBride earned a starting spot on the team, averaging 11.6 points per game and sinking half of her shots. She was also simply there for whatever role was needed of her.

"She loved her teammates and she wanted to win," explains McGraw. "She didn't care if she had two points or twenty points. If we won, that was all that mattered."

And they won *a lot*. The team made it all the way to the NCAA National Championship that year, although Baylor University came out on top. It only served to motivate McBride to improve even more and she never shied away from her coach's critiques.

"The other thing that made her special was that she really knew how to take criticism and work on it. She really responded well to feedback," McGraw says. If she scored 20 points, but only had three rebounds, McGraw reminded her to improve her rebounding. "She was somebody who responded well to being challenged like that."

McBride embraced a leadership role her junior year. "She was always well-liked and well-respected, but she could really relate to the younger players and help them along because she had some struggles," continues McGraw. "She was somebody who could really be an example for them to look up to."

The team again made it to the Final Four, but was

knocked out by Connecticut in the semifinal game. McBride had averaged 15.9 points, 4.6 rebounds, and 2.4 assists per game across the season. During her senior year, she averaged 17.6 points, 5.3 rebounds, and 3.8 assists per game. The team advanced all the way to the championship game, although again lost to Connecticut.

Despite these tough losses, McBride always elevated her game against UConn. "They called her the 'husky-killer,'" says McGraw with a laugh. "Every time we played Connecticut, she responded with a huge game. She has a winning record over them in her four years, which not a lot of people can say. She always really rose to the occasion."

McBride graduated from Notre Dame in 2014 with a degree in marketing. She left college ranked fifth all-time in career points for the Fighting Irish (1,876) and the highest ever in free throw percentage (88.2 percent). She also pulled down over 600 rebounds.

"I made some mistakes. It wasn't easy," McBride reflected in 2018. "I grew up a lot in my four years at Notre Dame. I wouldn't change anything. I came in as a girl and I left as a woman."

#### K-Mac in the WNBA

In 2014, McBride was drafted into the WNBA by the San Antonio Stars, the third overall pick. She started every game that season, led the team in scoring, and earned All-Rookie Team honors.

Fast-forward to this season and now, at 32 years old and a seasoned veteran playing with the Minnesota Lynx, McBride is one of the most effective players in the league at a time when the WNBA is more popular than ever. She's also transformed into one of the most prominent three-point shooters in the league, despite, by her own recent admission on the *Lynx Unleashed* podcast, not considering herself a three-point shooter before going pro. As she told the host, she'd known that she needed to expand her skillset and extend her shooting range in the WNBA. So, in typical Kayla McBride style, she made herself one of the best in the league at it. It's a testament to her work ethic.

In July, WNBA sportswriter Myles Ehrlich shared a clip of her on social media spotlighting just how clean of a game she plays in Minnesota's five-out motion offense. "It honestly feels like we're watching her hoop in an empty gym sometimes with how smoothly she moves around the court and finds openings," he wrote. "One of the coolest athletes in the [WNBA]."

Indeed, Kayla McBride really *is* just downright cool — and really fun to watch on the court. She moves seamlessly on offense with *and* without the ball, still with a bit of that streetball finesse.

So, when it was announced that she'd be making her fourth appearance in the WNBA All-Star Game, it likely wasn't a surprise to any of her fans. In typical fashion, she also found a way to make it about the team. "[I]t's the most talented team that I've played on and that's the reason I'm an All-Star," she said. "It's my teammates giving me confidence, allowing me to be myself day in and day out."

In her professional career, there have been injuries and setbacks. There have been trades and stresses, starting all over in a new city with a new team. Like

many in the WNBA, she plays during the off-season professionally in Europe where she's been very successful — but that experience comes with its own challenges, such as being away from family and potential burnout. Yet, with McBride, there is always a sense of gratitude.

"There was a time when playing ball was grassroots and there was no pay associated with it," reflects Charlie Ward. "You just did it because it was great enjoyment and a gift that God had blessed you with. And then it afforded you the opportunity to make a living doing it as your work."

"I never want to lose the love of the game. I never want anybody to say, 'Man, she just looks unhappy out there,'" McBride said in 2020. "I don't ever want to have to question why I play the game. It's because I love it."

"It all stems from the love of the sport," adds Ward. "Her team is playing well and she's a big part of it, so I'm happy."

As Minnesota's Star Tribune pointed out, McBride's past few seasons have been "a study of steady play." She brings an intensity to her game, but also genuinely looks like she's having fun. There's a joy in her game. In her recent conversation with Lynx play-by-play announcer Wendell Epps on *Lynx Unleashed*, they discussed this specifically. "I'm just playing with a lot of joy," she confirmed. "I want to be known as a great leader, a great teammate, and somebody that's just all about winning."

The conversation often circles back to this in recent years. "Happiness comes and goes, right?" she said in another interview. "But the joy that I have is consistent." In June, she brought it up again, noting that, sure, happiness itself fluctuates and the season is a grind. "You're traveling, you're tired, your body hurts," she explained. "But when you have that consistent joy, even in the hard moments, that's when you know you're in the right spot."

There aren't many with a bad word to say about Kayla McBride. "She's just so *likable*," observes McGraw. "I don't know anybody who ever had a problem with her because she cares so much about people and relationships and *values* those relationships. I can't wait to see what's next for her."

"She's just a pro," says Ward. "She's found a way to continue to improve her game and her leadership. If you play for an extended period of time and people *still* want you to be on their team, that shows you have great leadership."

"Hungry and humble and thankful," McBride likes to say, "but never satisfied."

"Sometimes we may not know the impact we have on people," Ward remarks. "People are watching what you do and say and how you hold yourself. [Kayla is] one of those that has just exemplified that and has been a great mainstay on her teams."

How many young players McBride has impacted may not be quantifiable, but it is certainly substantial. Whatever comes next for Kayla McBride and her story, it's very clear that there is a lot left to tell.

Jonathan Burdick runs the public history project *Rust & Dirt*. He can be reached at [jburdick@eriereader.com](mailto:jburdick@eriereader.com)





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## One World Tribe's 30th Anniversary and More at 2024 Celebrate Erie

Everything you need to know about this Erie-sistible event

By: Larry Wheaton

The City of Erie may only be a little over 19 square miles, but within that small amount of space is what really makes us a community — the diversity that runs through our streets influences the way we eat, the way we speak to each other, and the way we see the world. On the third weekend of August (Friday, Aug. 16 through Sunday, Aug. 18), Celebrate Erie, our annual celebration of all that makes us a community, will take place in the heart of the city, showcasing some of the area's finest food, art, and music.

Mike Russo, Celebrate Erie's production manager, spoke on the importance of Celebrate Erie to the community: "Events like Celebrate Erie offer a chance for every type of person in our city to see beautiful art, hear incredible music, play games, sample food, and just marvel at what a cool place we get to share as our home, and do it with our surrounding neighbors. The more we meet together, the more we realize just what we all have in common, which is so much. We don't just live in the city, we *are* the city, and here we get to see all these amazing talents that our neighbors have."

Russo went on to discuss the importance of this festival to the artists involved, "Finding our voices, and eventually presenting them on the biggest stage our city has to offer — we see all of our peers, and we can learn from and share so much with each other." With the event lasting for three days, attendees will have plenty of time to fully take in all that we have as a community to share with each other.

### What You'll Find

One of the best ways to understand what makes us all Erieites is at the Celebrate Erie Multicultural Marketplace, which will feature local merchants that represent the diverse cultures in our city and bring goods from around the world to Downtown Erie. Along with the Marketplace (sponsored by Erie Insurance), there will be plenty of international food vendors, unique to our city. Organizers for this year's event will have a two-block span between South Park Row and Eighth Street which will feature a diverse group of nearly 40 hometown vendors, artists, and businesses showcasing their wares. The west side of Perry Square will feature some of Erie's favorite local eats,

MARK AARON MINDLIN



Erie's own One World Tribe celebrates their 30th anniversary on the biggest stage Erie has to offer – Celebrate Erie's main stage. The group's longevity, both in their own tenure and the loyalty of their audience lies in their diversity which makes them relatable to a large, multi-faceted audience.

and for those looking to wet their whistle while taking in the sights and sounds, locally-made wine and craft beers will be available for purchase in the Beer Garden. There will also be food trucks, as well as all the brick-and-mortar bars and restaurants that line State Street.

While several city blocks along State from Fourth to Ninth will be closed, one thing is for sure; every block will be filled with eye-catching art. The ever popular Chalk Walk returns to display colorful, locally-created street murals between Eighth and Ninth streets. There will be 27 murals and the general public is encouraged to vote on their favorite, with the winner being announced at 5 p.m. Saturday night and receiving a grand prize. Attendees are also invited to explore a hometown gallery dedicated to local art and artists, or purchase art made by any of the myriad of artist vendors.

### The Music

The biggest draw for most Celebrate Erie attendees are the free musical performances happening throughout the weekend. Alongside a few national touring acts, most of the music on the small-

er stages is totally local. This year's headliners will be local legends One World Tribe kicking things off on Friday night. Saturday evening features early 2000s indie rock from Wheatus, known for their hit song "Teenage Dirtbag" and Jimmy Eat World, who are best known for their anthem "The Middle" and have sold over a million records worldwide, while releasing 10 studio albums over the years. Wrapping up the event Sunday night will be country music singer and *American Idol* finalist Gabby Barrett.

Mike Russo, who is responsible for booking the artists, mentions that each year the lineup will vary, "Some years it may be more hip-hop, some years more rock, some years more country. But that's part of the fun — because if it was the same thing all the time it would get stale really quickly."

He also spoke about Friday evening's performers, One World Tribe, who are celebrating three decades of playing uplifting music, "We are going to start the Main Stage off with The Breeze Band, following with Ivan Montero and his phenomenal, high-energy Latin band. Then we close with One World Tribe, who I per-

sonally think may be the most 'important' Erie band ever." This performance will mark the group's 30th anniversary and they will have members joining them on stage from every era and iteration of the group. It will, essentially, be one non-stop dance party.

Aside from the main stage, there is plenty of local music to enjoy all three days of Celebrate Erie.

Russo states, "As cool as the mainstage national acts are, I really think that Celebrate Erie shines the brightest when it showcases the incredible breadth of talent that our city has to offer. There really is something for everyone, and at nearly any point in the day you can stop by any stage and see something inspired, entertaining, and energizing."

Some of the local highlights featured on the mainstage will be Matty B & The Dirty Pickles celebrating their 20th anniversary with their final show in this formation, while Sunday's local mainstage acts will feature Brooke Surgener and Smilo & The Ghost. Music can also be found on the Perry Square stage.

Russo continues, "You get everything from the indie rock of This American





Local music is plentiful during Celebrate Erie – with acts taking multiple stages throughout Downtown Erie, like the Perry Square Stage pictured here with violinist Dave Tamulonis and drummer Brent Knight of local original band This American Song.

Song to a '60s sci-fi groove with Stephen Trohoske's X-Ray Audio. Our 814 Concert Series artists will all be represented, and you even get the full Gem City Jazz Ensemble on Sunday morning." The smaller Living Room Stage will feature acts with a wide range from the hip-hop of AyoDaDa, acoustic bluegrass of the Buttermilk Falls Gang, psych-rock of Kactai, and many other genres represented.

**One World Tribe Reunites for 30th Anniversary**

One World Tribe has been making music together for 30 years, decades longer than most bands. They are no strangers to the Celebrate Erie stage, playing on it four times already — most recently in 2018. The group has been playing locally for so long that they played at the annual celebration back when it was called "We Love Erie Days."

The band started out with the moniker The Naked Truth for only one show before changing their name to One World Tribe.

Formed by vocalist Preach Freedom and keyboardist Kennedy Thompson, they have long shared the stage with a "who's who" of Erie musicians.

Along with Preach and Kennedy this current ensemble features Mike Chin, Brad Amidon, Ceco Selinas, Rusty Jack-

son, Hansel Deschappelles, Assane Baye, Allen Zurcher, and Dan Nano. Thompson explains what we can expect at this 30th anniversary show: "Significant past members will be returning to get down with us. We've got Kennedy Lorya aka Dynamq, Frank Singer, Lauren Freeman, and Barbara Barrett. Dynamq has become an international figure in East African music as well as the Reggae Sound Clash scene. He recently signed with Sony Africa."

There has to be some kind of magic for a band to continue to want to play music and for fans to want to hear it for 30 years. Thompson told us what he enjoys about playing in One World Tribe: "The thing I enjoy the most is that when One World Tribe is standing on the stage together: it's a statement. You have all these individuals from different backgrounds on the stage together playing music that speaks to our common humanity. You have African American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Senegalese, Sudanese, Jamaican, and Caucasian. Lynn Johnson of the Amerimasala Festival says that it may be the most diverse group in the country. The One World Tribe audience represents that same diversity."

Kennedy also spoke about the future of the band, "The future plans are to finish an album we've been working on

for three years. It should get released in 2025. As far as live shows we're going to have to see — there are some band members battling health challenges at this time. We're going to have to wait and see how those play out."

**Family Fun**

Along with all the music, art, and food there will still be plenty of engaging family fun activities located in east Perry Square on the Family District Stage (sponsored by VNET Fiber). The Family District will have hands-on activities including music, dance, and wellness activities for children of all ages. There will also be an interactive family experience that will feature crafting, STEM, music, and arts for the whole family to participate in.

Adrienne Nannen, the city's events manager, mentions, "The Erie Philharmonic will have an instrumental petting zoo, where kids can play and learn about different instruments. Taradoodles will offer exciting Erie-themed face painting. The Brown Clowns will provide a full carnival experience with games and prizes. There is something for everyone!"

Russo continues, "There will be so many varieties of dance and song — with In Purpose Studios, Aine Celtic Academy School of Irish Dance, and many others. There will also be Elvis Lives with Kurt Nova, magic shows and children's storytimes, and some visiting bunnies from E.A.R.S. There will be Tae Kwon Do demonstrations and the rock and pop stars of tomorrow with Attention Switch, and Emmet & Olivia as well."

There is also an opportunity to see some of Erie's hometown businesses and the people behind them at the Small Business retail setups, which are tailored to showcase and feature unique products sold in Erie, while the Interactive Showcase will display the products and services from Erie's business communities and include hands-on demonstrations and activities.

Nannen mentions that her favorite part of the annual event is "seeing Erie residents and visitors come together to enjoy an evening of music on the main-stage to close out each day of activities, with a beautiful backdrop of Erie's bay-front and sunset." Meanwhile, Russo enjoys that "everyone attending is having their own personal version of the festival. There's always something new to experience. Different food, vendors, music, entertainment and settings. If you give yourself a little time, you are guaranteed to see and hear something new and exciting."

So, give yourself some time to take in all that Erie has to offer in culture and creativity and Celebrate Erie with our community.

*Consider a gift to Cultures, Arts, Festivals and Events of Erie (CAFE) which helps support local festivals like Celebrate Erie at [eriegives.org](http://eriegives.org)*

*You can find Larry Wheaton at Celebrate Erie all weekend — assisting at the Chalk Walk for his fifth year running, or playing on multiple stages with his bands This American Song, X-Ray Audio, and Steely Mac. He can be reached at [wheaton1138@gmail.com](mailto:wheaton1138@gmail.com)*



The family stage at Celebrate Erie is fun for everyone, featuring magic shows, dance and martial arts performances, wellness activities, and music. Make sure the kids visit the Erie Philharmonic instrument petting zoo which might spark a budding musical future.



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Our mission is to help children/youth become involved in school and community activities and to purchase items to enhance self-esteem in an effort to create positive childhood memories. We hope that you will consider our organization worthy of your financial support.



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August 13<sup>th</sup> 2024

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## Gem City Style

An interview with Erie Insurance's Tim NeCastro and Christine Blashock

By: Jessica Hunter

**A**t the Erie Reader we mark August with our annual Erie Gives Day issue. Erie Gives Day would be best described as a community-spirited day of giving to local nonprofit organizations leading to a healthier, more economically vibrant and culturally rich community. For this issue, I sat down with Erie Insurance CEO Tim NeCastro and Chief Diversity & Community Development Officer Christine Blashock to discuss the Fortune 500 company's commitment to community service.

**Jessica Hunter (JH):** Erie Insurance has been a part of the downtown area for many years and service has been a part of the company's vision from the beginning. Can you shed some light on the tradition of giving at Erie Insurance?

**Tim NeCastro (TN):** Our company has existed for nearly 100 years, and service to the community has always been a vital part of who we are. Early in the company's history, our founder H.O. Hirt encouraged employees to follow his example and make small monthly donations to the War Orphans Fund. We've continued his vision today by supporting a longstanding Adopt-a-School partnership with Pfeiffer Burleigh School, United Way projects that enhance the Community Schools Model, and our Investing in Our Future fund, all of which strengthen education and build brighter futures for children in our community.

The promise of Erie Insurance being above all in service continues to pass from generation to generation within our company. As we look ahead to 2025 when we'll celebrate our 100th anniversary, we do it with the knowledge that Erie Insurance will always remain committed to our legacy of service, and to the communities we serve.

**JH:** There are hundreds of organizations in the area that would benefit from Erie Insurance support. How do you decide which nonprofit organizations are going to receive a donation?

**Christine Blashock (CB):** At Erie Insurance, supporting the communities where we live and work is at the center of what we do. We know how important these investments are, and we've identified three key focus areas of giving so we can make a meaningful impact: Community Building, Safety, and Environmental Responsibility. Our Community Outreach team works to develop partnerships, administer grants, and coordinate volunteer projects and in-kind donations for many nonprofit organizations serving our communities. And then there are our company-wide programs that encourage our agents and employees to give where they live. Through Erie Insurance Service Corps, our employees are given 9.5 paid hours a year to volunteer in the community, and many give more of their own time. While we encourage our employees to help organizations that align with our focus areas of giving, they can also support nonprofits that are personally important to them. Erie Insurance also has a matching gifts program where employee donations to eligible charities receive a 100 percent company match.



Jessica Hunter recently met with the CEO of Erie Insurance Tim NeCastro (pictured right), along with the company's chief diversity and community development officer Christine Blashock to discuss the transformational philanthropy of the Fortune 500 company ahead of Erie Gives Day.

**JH:** Charitable contributions, no matter what size, can make a difference for any organization. What about you, personally? How do you decide which organizations to support; and are there any, in particular, which you are supporting for Erie Gives Day?

**TN:** My wife Lisa and I grew up in Erie and raised our family here, so we love this community and feel called to support it in whatever way we can. In particular, we think it's important to lift up the children of the community, making sure they have the resources and support to thrive and be set up for future success. That's why we chaired the expERIENCE Children's Museum capital campaign in 2019, and it's why we're excited to be the co-chairs of United Way of Erie County's Uniting for Education endowment campaign that was recently launched. We're aiming to raise \$15 million to expand United Way's Community School Model into Erie High School and sustain the model going forward.

Lisa and I grew up in modest households without

much money, but we both had strong and caring support systems. What we've learned working closely with United Way and our local school leaders is that too many children here in our community don't have that support and lack basic needs like food, clothing, personal hygiene, and safety. These challenges hold them back from learning and being successful. Imagine a child trying to concentrate in school when they haven't had a meal in two days or walked to school in the winter without a coat. Those barriers to learning are what the Community Schools Model is helping to address. That's why Lisa and I got involved, and it's also why Erie Insurance has put its support behind this initiative with a \$1 million gift to help launch the Community Schools Model at Erie High.

**JH:** Tell us about the collaborations and efforts with an organization such as The Erie Community Foundation and Erie Gives Day. What is an example of a successful partnership?



## FEATURE

**CB:** Collaborations with organizations like the Erie Community Foundation are important to our community outreach work at Erie Insurance. Our partnership with the Erie Community Foundation on Erie Gives Day is one of the many ways we lean in to support nonprofits in our hometown. Erie Insurance has been involved with Erie Gives since the beginning, and every year we are inspired by how the community comes together on this day. This year, we're pleased to increase our donation to the Erie Community Foundation's match pool to \$100,000. We want to help continue the enthusiasm and encourage the community to continue its support of the more than 500 nonprofits that are registered participants this year. Erie Gives has such a positive impact on Erie's nonprofit sector, enabling these organizations to continue their great work meeting community needs and helping them grow for the future.

**JH:** How does Erie Insurance measure the impact of its charitable contributions? Are there specific metrics or success stories that highlight the effectiveness of your giving?

**CB:** We work hand in hand with our nonprofit partners to ensure that programs we support can achieve meaningful results. Impact is measured in part through capacity models and grant reports to ensure the strength and sustainability of funded programs. We value data and know it is a measure of success, but we also recognize that the work we do in the community is about more than numbers — it's about people and moving our community forward.

**JH:** The investments in Downtown Erie have been transformational, largely thanks to the support of Erie Insurance. How does Erie Insurance stay informed about the evolving needs of the Erie community? What does the future of giving look like for Erie Insurance?

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**"Our partnership with the Erie Community Foundation on Erie Gives Day is one of the many ways we lean in to support nonprofits in our hometown. Erie Insurance has been involved with Erie Gives since the beginning, and every year we are inspired by how the community comes together on this day."**  
— Christine Blashock, chief diversity and community development officer at Erie Insurance

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**TN:** I often say that our roots are here, and they are deep. And what I mean by that is, as Erie Insurance has grown from a small, local auto insurer to a Fortune 500 company that does business in 12 states and D.C., we've remained invested in our hometown and committed to

Erie's economic growth. It's no secret that our investment has grown stronger in recent times.

For the many employees in our organization who are lending their time and expertise to these efforts, it's more than business for us, it's personal. We now have over 6,800 employees — more than half here in Erie — and we make sure they understand and embrace our great responsibility to help grow and develop communities where our own families live and work. That service by our employees also helps us understand the evolving needs in our communities and how we, as a company, can help meet those needs. Erie Insurance is built on a strong foundation of relationships. We recognize that there's power in numbers — and the necessity of connections in how we get work done, both within and outside of our organization.

Erie is seeing new companies entering the market, economic growth through entrepreneurship, and unprecedented capital investments being made downtown. There is real excitement about our community's future and that's what we're focused on. The work underway will continue to make our city a vibrant place to live and work. And I'm thrilled that through our company's giving and other impact investments that we are helping to improve the overall quality of life in Erie.

To learn more about Erie Insurance's Giving Network visit [erie-insurance.com/givingnetwork](http://erie-insurance.com/givingnetwork)

Jessica Hunter can be found at [jessicahunterphotos.com](http://jessicahunterphotos.com)



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## Meet Casey

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*"Mercy Center helped me become a woman again- a responsible parent, and to find peace and patience in my life. I was able to sit with myself and love the woman I'm becoming."*



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## The People of Allegheny Beverage Company

Employee-forward business shares staff's stories

It has been a goal of Allegheny Beverage Company (ABC) to be as progressive as possible when it comes to meeting their employees' needs and helping them grow in their careers, as well as encouraging a healthy work/life balance. Since the company came together within their brand new, state-of-the-art facility two years ago, the beer wholesaler that serves Erie and the surrounding region has created a space where employees can feel at ease, can experience true upward mobility, and develop meaningful work relationships.

ABC President John DiMario (Erie's 40 Under 40 class in 2023) believes that focusing on the employee's job satisfaction should be paramount and knows that keeping good employees takes more than an occasional pizza party — it means providing meaningful opportunities for advancement and connection.

When one thinks of a standard employee meeting room, visions of a windowless area with bad lighting and sterile office furniture usually come to mind. The meeting space at ABC, which is located at 7265 Klier Drive in Fairview, within an idyllic, expansive green meadow full of local flora and fauna, is the complete opposite of that image. DiMario explains, "This is a communal space — we didn't want it to be just a meeting room, we wanted it to feel like a cool craft brewery and to take advantage of the natural light ... We came from our original location on West Grandview which was right by the highway and there was no green space, it was just all blacktop."

With a custom-designed, handmade bartop situated directly in front of open air, garage-style doors leading to a patio backed onto greenspace — the meeting room has four beers that ABC distributes on tap at any given time. And on Fridays, the employees are all encouraged to hang out after work, to have a beer, and relax by the fire pit or play a game of cornhole. DiMario reflects, "At the end of the week people from different departments come together. You know, the drivers and the salespeople might not see each other every day — then at the end of the week they can come in here, grab a beer, and catch up."

On a warm, but overcast Friday afternoon, three employees from differ-

JESSICA HUNTER



The workplace environment at Allegheny Beverage Company, nestled within the business park on Klier Drive in Fairview, is progressive and upwardly mobile. Owner John DiMario has taken significant steps towards making sure that his employees feel at ease and motivated with a healthy work/life balance.

ent departments gathered in this very meeting room at the bar to unwind and talk about their experiences at ABC, what they like about working for the company, and why they love and are committed to Erie.

Mike Travers is the area sales manager who has been an employee of the company since it was Glenwood Beer. He's seen the changes the company has made and is grateful for the positive evolution. "When someone new comes into a workplace you've been in for years, it's hard to know what to expect. When the previous owner passed away and John and his family came in from Dayton, they kept on most of the same employees — they invested a lot into this company in terms of technology to make things easier and better for us," Travers reflects. "It was a huge help, especially during COVID when there were constant inventory issues — they've really streamlined the business."

Travers is an Erie native who is com-

mitted to the area and loves to spend as much time as possible recreating within our best natural resource — Presque Isle. "I love fishing, I grew up close to the bayfront and my dad always took me fishing and it's just one of those things I've always kept up with."

At this, Damien Farrell interjects, "I didn't know that you liked to fish — I would have asked you to go fishing a ton of times if I had known that. Let's go fishing sometime!" Farrell, a soft-spoken young father of two, is having exactly the kind of employee connection that DiMario envisioned would happen within this space.

Farrell shares that, while he enjoys hanging out with the other ABC folks in the meeting space, he's not really a drinker — which is a great quality in a CDL licensed truck driver. Farrell didn't start out as a delivery driver, though, and is a perfect example of the kind of upward mobility ABC offers their employees. Farrell shares,

"I started as a helper. I wanted to be a driver from the beginning but I waited for seniority and I got lucky. I've been here for almost three years and I've had my CDL (which ABC helped facilitate) for a year and a half." And with that promotion, a job turned into a career for Farrell, "I love it. I love being out on the road — I didn't want to be stuck in a building anymore, like at my old jobs. I try to get as much overtime as I can, so I can be outside as much as possible."

While on the subject of upward mobility, Mya Papucci, a sales representative, was promoted within two weeks of being hired as a sales merchandiser. Her professionalism was immediately recognized and she was able to step into a role perfectly suited to her soon after being hired on. Papucci had a goal of working for ABC for years in her previous job, and actually came to have a great working relationship with Travers before she even started at ABC. "I worked for U Pick 6 for about





Allegheny Beverage Group: Get to know the people behind the Allegheny Beverage Company – we shared a beer with and learned more about (from left) delivery driver Damien Farrell, sales representative Mya Papucci, and area sales manager Mike Travers.

seven years as a bar manager there and I actually saw Mike frequently and I've known him for a while, so I sent over my resume. I knew this was what I wanted to do for about five years before I eventually applied."

For Papucci, Erie means family – which is important to her, as she

in, done with their shifts for the day, the graphic design department stops in for a beer – the music is playing, everyone's chatting, laughing, sharing stories. It doesn't feel like work, and that is exactly what DiMario envisioned when he designed this new space for all the employees to enjoy,

It can be hard to believe when someone says that their coworkers feel like family, but here at ABC, on a late Friday afternoon, that is definitely the vibe ... It doesn't feel like work, and that is exactly what [ABC President] John DiMario envisioned when he designed this new space for all the employees to enjoy, putting Allegheny Beverage Company on the forefront of progressive workplaces in Erie.

sees herself as the glue that holds her family together. "Outside of work, I'm pretty athletic. I love to go to the gym and play racquetball. But really I love to just hang out with the family. I have two siblings, one who lives out of town, and I'm often the one who brings all the family together."

It can be hard to believe when someone says that their coworkers feel like family, but here at ABC, on a late Friday afternoon, that is definitely the vibe. Some of the drivers come to join

putting Allegheny Beverage Company on the forefront of progressive workplaces in Erie.

To learn more about Allegheny Beverage Company, visit [alleghenybeverage.co](http://alleghenybeverage.co)

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## EVENTS

### Night at the Light

Presque Isle Lighthouse hosts third annual fundraiser

**SATURDAY, AUG. 10**

Erie is an essential port city with a rich maritime history. It is home to three lighthouses — the Land Lighthouse, Erie Harbor North Pierhead Light, and the Presque Isle Lighthouse — the latter two of which are still in use for navigational aid today. In the 150+ years since their construction, and with the ever-changing conditions of Presque Isle State Park, the need for preservation is more apparent than ever.

On Aug. 10, the Presque Isle Lighthouse will open its doors for a 21+ night of fun, food, and great music to raise additional funding towards renovations and preservation of our lighthouses. Music will be provided by Key West Express and food will be catered by Pineapple Eddie.

In addition to food and music, the lighthouse will offer nighttime tower climbs, yard games, a popcorn machine, and the chance to win various prizes provided by local businesses and artists.

Averie Shaughnessy-Comfort is the ex-

ecutive director of the Presque Isle Light Station, also known as Lake Erie Lights. After the success of the lighthouse's previous fundraisers, she is excited to welcome back guests and sponsors for another sandy soiree: "Thanks to these funds, we've been able to move our timeline up on many necessary projects, the next one being some much-needed TLC to the Presque Isle Lighthouse's tower base."

The lighthouse was once a private residence to its keepers and park staff. However, its transition into a public building has required continuous care and maintenance, "We have been very fortunate to be recipients of grants and funding that have allowed us to completely renovate the Presque Isle Lighthouse, bringing it back to its period of significance between 1900 and 1920. The summer kitchen is the last piece of that project."

Renovations are projected to finish by the end of the operating season. — Cassandra Gripp

ERIN PHILLIPS



Support the restoration of the historic Presque Isle Light Station while enjoying food, drinks, music, art, and sunset trips to the top of the lighthouse at their annual fundraiser, Night at the Light.

Consider a gift to the Presque Isle Light Station / Lake Erie Lights on Erie Gives day by visiting [eriegives.org](http://eriegives.org)

6 p.m. // Presque Isle Lighthouse, 301 Peninsula Dr. // \$85 for members, \$105 for non-members // For tickets and info: [presqueislelighthouse.org/experiences/fundraiser](http://presqueislelighthouse.org/experiences/fundraiser)

### Corgi Fest Returns for Sixth Year

Tails will be waggin' at this fun festival

**SATURDAY, AUG. 11**

Calling all corgi owners, corgi lovers, and corgi admirers — we've got the perfect festival for you. Frontier Park will be welcoming Corgi Fest back to its grounds after a one-year hiatus, and this year is set to be better than ever.

With more than 320 corgis and their humans anticipated to be in attendance, this festival will be a corgi lover's dream.

Frontier Park will be welcoming Corgi Fest back to its grounds after a one-year hiatus, and this year is set to be better than ever.

Owners and their corgis as well as other attendees are invited to visit vendors, food trucks, photo booths, and check out festival merch throughout the day.

The event will open at 10 a.m., with an array of goods available from the 16 vendors and food trucks. Just some of the participating vendors are Hanging



No one, absolutely no one, can resist the short-statured, nubby-tailed, nugget-of-adorableness that is a corgi — and hundreds of corgis in one place? That's a little slice of canine heaven. Join Erie-area corgi enthusiasts at Frontier Park this August for a celebration of this heart-capturing breed.

with the Corgis, Corgasaur, Wally Sue's Main Squeeze, Sundae Gourmet Vegan Dessert & Ice Cream, Paddy Wack Snack Shack, and more.

The event will also feature a costume contest and corgi races before wrapping up the day with a group photo of all corgis and their owners and the announcement of raffle giveaway winners.

Registration and ticket purchase must be completed online prior to entrance to the event, but day-of registration will be

available. When registering, be sure to fill in the required forms and waiver necessary for attending the event, available on the site. — Ally Kutz

Consider a donation to LEAF (Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier) during Erie Gives Day by visiting [eriegives.org](http://eriegives.org)

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. // Frontier Park, 1501 W. 6th St. // \$15 per ticket (corgis and young children free) // For tickets and info: [corgifest.com](http://corgifest.com).



## Fire Lights Festival Burning Bright in its Fourth Year

The festival brings jam, EDM, and bass music together with performances and workshops

**BEGINNING FRIDAY, AUG. 16**

Now in its fourth year — and second at the Heron grounds — the Fire Lights festival shows no signs of slowing down. With headliners like New Zealand's TRUTH, Colorado's Sunsquabi, and California and New Mexico's Desert Dwellers, the fest has talents from all over the world as well as from all around the region. With 101 musical performances spread out over three days, the beloved farmland in Sherman, N.Y. will once again find itself brimming with excitement. There's the Middle Eastern fusion trio Consider the Source, a special Mac Miller Tribute from Rochester called Come Back to Earth, along with Gantzer Does Pink Floyd (featuring members of Aqueous, Moe., and Twiddle), Minika, Land of Panda, and Jason Leech.

Of course, as anyone who has been to Fire Lights before will attest to, the music is just the beginning.

With dozens of different informational panels, interactive improvisational experiences, and the eponymous fire flow performances, it's virtually impossible to take everything in.

"We have some really awesome workshops happening," detailed Andrew Lehr, one of the festival's founders. "We have ice baths, yoga, meditation, and sound-healing sessions. We also have instructional workshops on how to make electronic music and how to write a song, as well as how to spin or be in the flow community." There are workshops for painting, audio/visual techniques, and harm reduction (limiting the negative consequences of recreational drug use) as well.



Get into the experience that is the Fire Lights Festival. Now in their fourth year, the multi-day concert, which provides on-site camping, brings audiences a variety of live music along with experiences like meditation, yoga, sound-healing, and workshops.

There will be a new stage constructed, with what was known as the Disco Inferno to be deemed the Dragon Stage (Heron-goers tip: it's at the Drum Circle Stage) complete with an LED wall and lasers.

"Fire Lights has really grown over the years," Lehr explained. "Experiencing the community's growth is something that means so much to the people in our area. The event brings people together for electronic music and jam bands," Lehr continued, noting that "we're really able to create something special that you don't often see." — Nick Warren

*Musical performances beginning at noon on Friday, Aug. 16, running to midnight on Sunday, Aug. 18 (special Thursday arrival available starting at 9 a.m.) // The Heron Farm & Event Center, 2361 Waits Corners Rd., Sherman, N.Y. // For tickets, full lineup, and more information, go to [firelightsfestival.com](http://firelightsfestival.com)*

## Young Adult Summer Book Tour Sets Sail on the Victorian Princess

Bringing library programming to young readers throughout the region

**TUESDAY, AUG. 20**

The Young Adult (YA) Summer Book Tour from the Erie County Public Library takes a lakeside voyage on the *Victorian Princess* this month, concluding a program encouraging teenagers to read, socialize, and exchange books and ideas.

"Join the Teen Advisory Board in a read-around-town event to talk about your favorite books, socialize, and read," the Erie County Public Library describes. "Bring a book, share your thoughts, and read together. Free book and prize giveaways while supplies last at each program."

Programmed alongside the Step Out And Read (S.O.A.R.) Challenge, the YA Summer Book Tour requires teenagers to complete six hours of reading between events to win pins and bucket hats as prizes. These events have taken place throughout the summer in spaces such as the Frontier Park Labyrinth and Presque Isle State Park. The program serves as a part of the library's summer programming for readers of all ages, with events planned in partnership with organizations including Tamarack Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Asbury Woods, WQLN, and the expERIENCE Children's Museum. Expanding beyond the library's five



In the final installment of a summer-long program, the Erie County Public Library takes to the seas. The Young Adult Summer Book Tour allows area teens an opportunity to get together, read together, have discussions, and win book-related prizes. Their final (free) get-together will take place aboard the *Victorian Princess*.

locations, the "Librarians on the Loose" series and the Public Library's bookmobile is able to bring the library directly into Erie neighborhoods with readings, activities, programs, and full library services. — Thomas Taylor

*Consider a gift to the Friends of the Erie County Library which supports programs like these on Erie Gives Day by visiting [eriegives.org](http://eriegives.org)*

*6 to 8 p.m. // Victorian Princess, 1 State St. // Free // For more info: [events.erie.library.org](http://events.erie.library.org)*



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[www.eriebirdobservatory.org](http://www.eriebirdobservatory.org)

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## Pip-pip-hooray! It's *Pippin* at PACA

Scaled-down production puts emphasis on character

FRIDAY, AUG. 30

In the eighth century a son was born to the great emperor Charlemagne. Twelve hundred years later, that son, Pepin, would become the unlikely subject of a 1972 musical by Stephen Schwartz, Roger O. Hirson, and the incomparable Bob Fosse. The musical *Pippin* only retains a morsel of the historical truth of Pepin's story; but that's likely for the

"We follow a young man [in Pippin] who is looking for meaning and purpose in his life....he looks for it everywhere he can and, ultimately, finds that the answers were not where he thought they'd be. It's such a simple message, but so universal and relatable." — *Pippin* director Kate Neubert-Lechner

best, as *Pippin* has a much more inspiring message than the Frankish prince's actual fate (which was to die, likely of the plague, while banished to a monastery).

Bringing Pepin's journey to the PACA stage is none other than local theater

legend Kate Neubert-Lechner, in her capacity as director and choreographer. "I've always been drawn to *Pippin* for a couple of reasons," Neubert-Lechner said. "The first is that the original production was directed and choreographed by Bob Fosse, who is my absolute favorite creative brain to have ever made theater and dance."

"The second reason...is the universal message that it imparts," she continued. "We follow a young man who is looking for meaning and purpose in his life....he looks for it everywhere he can and, ultimately, finds that the answers were not where he thought they'd be. It's such a simple message, but so universal and relatable."

PACA's production will be scaled down compared to larger shows and casts, with more focus on Pepin's story. "The overall production design is centered around a carnival, sideshow feel," Neubert-Lechner explained.

And after *Pippin* takes the audience on his journey, Neubert-Lechner hopes that everyone takes "the time to see and ap-

DIGIT DAVE SCHROEDER



The folks at PACA are producing the timeless tale of *Pippin*, a story with a universal message of the search for meaning and purpose in life. Directed by Erie's own Kate Neubert-Lechner and starring a menagerie of Erie theater veterans – the group brings the vision of the 1972 Bob Fosse musical to life.

preciate the beauty, joy, and fulfillment that exists in the simple things in their lives." — Cara Suppa

Consider a gift to the Performing Artist Collective Alliance (PACA) on Erie Gives Day by visiting [eriegives.org](http://eriegives.org)

Fridays and Saturdays, Aug. 30 through Sept. 14 at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 15 at 2 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$20 // For tickets and info: [tickets.erieareader.com](http://tickets.erieareader.com)

## Rekindled Inspiration at Arts and Drafts 2024

Erie-born artist Brett Biebel featured at annual festival

BEGINNING THURSDAY, SEPT. 5

If you are looking for the perfect event to round out your summer, look no further than Arts and Drafts 2024. The annual festival that features local artists, musicians, and great food and drink pairings will kick off at The Brewerrie at Union Station on the Thursday after Labor Day.

Festival coordinator Amanda Ferguson, who is celebrating her 10th year in that role, says she "strives to enhance the event by curating an even more diverse range of artists, incorporating innovative installations, and expanding the festival's reach." To that end, this year's featured artist is Brett Biebel. Brett is an Erie-born artist, raised on a farm south of the city, and was inspired in childhood by his mother's sketches. Biebel eventually moved away in his youth to explore life and found that returning home to Erie helped further his creativity and art.

"In 2021, I decided to leave California and return to Erie. This move accompanied by my father's encour-

agement and introduction to a wonderful group of artists immediately rekindled my inspiration and connection to the remarkable art community in the area," states Biebel. "I cannot predict the trajectory or impact of my art, but I wholeheartedly embrace the journey and the growth potential. I greatly appreciate the privilege and opportunity to continue to touch our community with my work," he adds.

As in years past, the festival will include local music for all three days on the Trackside Beer Garden Stage. The lineups are still in the works but you can expect to see a good half dozen of your favorite local bands each day of the festival.

When asked if there was anything else she wanted festival-goers to know, Ferguson replied, "This festival holds immense significance for this city, as it not only showcases the incredible talents of local and visiting artists and musicians but also fosters a sense of community and cultural appreciation." — Edwina Capozziello

ERIN PHILLIPS



The annual celebration of local art and beer returns to the Brewerrie at Union Station for Arts and Drafts. Featured artist Brett Biebel displays his work alongside dozens of local artists in a weekend filled with locally produced visual art and original music.

Art Show Hours: Thursday, Sept. 5 from noon to 11 p.m. // Friday, Sept. 6 and Saturday Sept. 7 from noon to midnight // \$5 cover after 8 p.m.

Music Hours: Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 6 to 11 p.m. // \$5 cover after 8 p.m. // The Brewerrie at Union Station, 123 W. 14th St.

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## Looking for More Events?

Remember to visit the Erie Reader's Online Calendar at [erieareader.com/calendar](http://erieareader.com/calendar)

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## FOOD

### The Erie Cook Book Revisited: Mrs. Saltsman's Chicken Croquettes

Face your fears of frying in August



By: Morgan Yezzi

Equal parts fried chicken and chicken nugget, this croquette takes the hard work out of making fried chicken while weaving it together with the promise of a chicken nugget. This particular croquette is a par-cooked, spiced chicken mixture formed into a quenelle shape, coated in a cracker crumb crust, and then shallow fried in hot lard until golden brown.

To deep fry in the summer is to be fun and fancy free. Wait until the hottest day, put the shades down, crank the fan on high, don your apron, and embrace your inner fry cook. When the last croquette is out of the oil, then and only then can you go outside to picnic with your freshly fried spoils.

Adapted from Mrs. Robert Saltsman's contribution Laura Sterrett's 1881 *Erie Cook Book*.

#### Chicken Croquettes

Makes 24

- 1 lb. ground chicken
- ¾ cup grated onion
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon flour
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon cayenne
- Pinch nutmeg
- 1.5 teaspoons salt
- 1 whole egg + 2 egg yolks
- 2 cups cracker crumbs (such as Saltine)
- Lard for frying

Mix together 1 pound of ground chicken and ¾ cup of grated onion in a bowl.

In a large skillet, melt 1 tablespoon of butter and 1 tablespoon of flour. Whisk together over low heat until lightly browned in color, 3-4 minutes. Pour in ½ cup of buttermilk and continue whisking until smooth and creamy, 2 minutes. Add in the ground chicken, 1 teaspoon cayenne, a light grating of nutmeg, 1.5 teaspoons salt, one whole egg, and two yolks. Cook for seven to 10 minutes or until the moisture has cooked off.

Remove the chicken from the heat to cool. Lay out 2 cups of pulverized cracker crumbs on a tray, preferably saltines. Begin forming small ovals out of the chicken mixture and roll them in the cracker crumbs to coat. Fry in hot lard (350 degrees Fahrenheit) for 1 minute on each side.

Serve with lime wedges and tomato salad.



## Damnit, Janet

*Janet Planet* is a quirky and melancholic debut



*Janet Planet*, the debut film of Pulitzer-winning playwright Annie Baker is, at its heart, a love story. Although in this instance, that love is one between mother and daughter and the evolution of their relationship as adolescence approaches. It is a simple but quietly profound film of connection and disconnection, the beginnings and endings of relationships, and the unique pains of getting older. It is also one of the most fascinating films released this summer.

In the summer of 1991, 11-year-old Lacey (Zoe Ziegler) lives with her free-spirit mother Janet (Julianne Nicholson) in rural western Massachusetts. Lacey is a bit of a lonely girl, living in her own imagination and finding solace in the close relationship with her mother. However, her feelings change through the summer as various people come into Janet's orbit, revealing to Lacey for the first time the differences between them.

Baker herself has described the film as being about "falling out of love with your

mother," but that may be seen as a little too dramatic. It could also be seen as the first time one views a parent beyond the idealized gaze of childhood and how this new perspective shines a mirror on oneself.

Janet and Lacey share a deep connection and Baker emphasizes this with some ingenious blocking and use of match-cut editing. Seeing a parent's flaws and faults is a difficult part of growing up but important in understanding of one's own values. Baker presents this universal truth with a kind of bitter-sweet optimism, making her film one of the most lived-in and humanistic of the year. *Janet Planet* is currently playing in select theaters and will be available on VOD on Sept. 1. — Forest Taylor

*Written and directed by Annie Baker // Starring Zoe Ziegler, Julianne Nicholson, Sophie Okonedo, Will Patton, June Walker Grossman, Abby Harri, Edie Moon Kearns, Mary Beth Brooker, Mary Shultz, and Elias Koteas // A24 // 113 minutes // Rated PG-13*



## @Karanormal is a Twistingly Captivating, Locally-made Thriller

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A suspenseful super-indie with a horror twist, @Karanormal is the first

cinematic offering from Erie's Everything at Once Studios LLC. A partnership between Tony See (Cunningham) and Da-

vid Skarupski, you may have heard of them from their long-running interview podcast of the same name, photo services, or Unplugged Treehouse Concert series.

The story begins with Kara Johnston, better known as @Karanormal, a popular and aptly-named vlogger who specializes in the supernatural. When her series is exposed to be a fraud, she issues an apology video that begins the film. Telling her fans that she needs a break from New York City, she books an AirBnB near her hometown in Chautauqua County to attempt to be just "normal Kara."

She's then joined by Adele Crotty (Best of Erie 2023 Best Local Actress Winner), who is superbly funny and scathingly biting as Kara's sister Jess. Helping her with her temporary move, Jess serves as her most trusted confidant, and weathered familial connection.

Local songwriter Matthew Crays plays Kara's often-distracted boyfriend, Jake. Crays is entertaining and always on-target, whether Kara deserves better from a boyfriend or not.

The real heavy lifting of the piece is of course done by Colleen Munn as Kara

herself. Delivering the lion's share of the on-screen dialogue, the success of the film hinges on her reactions and line delivery. With the looks and sincerity of a classic Scream Queen, Munn's performance absolutely nails it.

While @Karanormal is of course a super-low-budget film (achieved thanks to its GoFundMe campaign and inclusion of local sponsors), it uses its limitations to its advantage at nearly every turn. While the use of one primary location, well-rehearsed long shots, a short running time, and small cast are huge pluses, the real magic is the rapid-fire script. @Karanormal is smart, with insightful social media takes and believable performances, making it an adventure to watch, even after multiple viewings. — Nick Warren

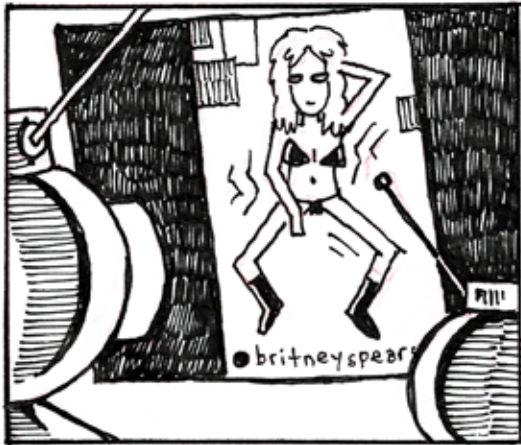
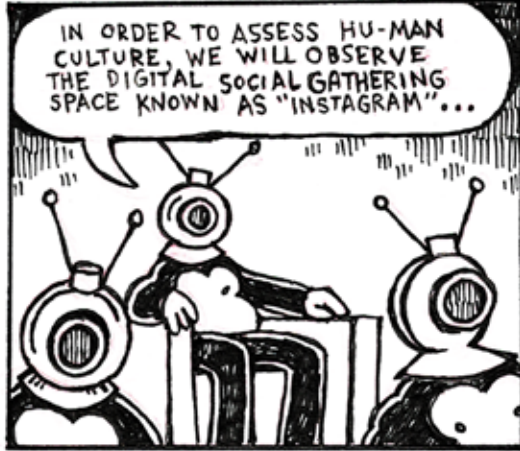
For more information, go to [www.everythingatoncestudios.com](http://www.everythingatoncestudios.com)

*Directed by Tony See // Written by Dave Skarupski // Starring: Colleen Munn, Adele Crotty, Matthew Crays, Thomas Morgan, Matt Royek, Scott Koestel, Alex Tacket, Charles Brown, and Blair Phillips // 47 minutes // Unrated*



# OOPS, I DID INSTAGRAM

BY BRAD PATTULLO  
@2024  
bradpattullo.com



# JUST TOYIN' WITCHA — BY B. TOY

SUMMER SCENES AROUND ERIE QUIZ

Presque Isle , Sunday 7AM

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THIS PICTURE?

- A. Downward facing dog
- B. Communing with biting flies
- C. Sand everywhere (and we mean everywhere)
- D. YES! Blue beach glass!
- E. Look at my butt



# FRIDGE COMICS

BY Anthony @ants art house



# Fish that Talk

THE NEANDERTHALESE



Google Translate

Neanderthalese	English
Ughtag stesad ky'dex qeque zawss!!	You got peanut butter in my chocolate!!
Zawss stesad ky'dex qeque Ughtag!!	You got chocolate in my peanut butter!!



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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

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The League of Women Voters is a peoples' organization that has fought at the federal, state, and local level since 1920 to improve our government. We never endorse or oppose political parties or candidates, but work to engage Americans in the decisions that impact their lives through broad educational efforts as well as advocacy.

Formed from the movement that secured women's right to vote, the centerpiece of the League's efforts remains to expand participation and give a voice to all Americans.

### Why Should I Support the League of Women Voters?

The League is different from many organizations because we are truly volunteer-driven. From our legislative luncheons, school education programs, our presence at naturalization ceremonies to welcome new citizens, voter registration, we are a grassroots organization providing every member with opportunities to engage in our democracy. We believe that we need everyone to participate in order for our community to be strong, safe and vibrant. Whether you contribute your time, your money, or both you can feel confident that your investment in democracy goes further in the League.





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**Zach Bryan**

*The Great American Bar Scene*  
Belting Bronco Records / Warner Records



Zach Bryan offers a tour of small-town sentimentality on *The Great American Bar Scene*.



Released less than a year after his Grammy award-winning self-titled record, the Oklahoman returns with its spiritual sibling. With a similar length, various features, and a poem opener, the two albums appear identical in format. However, what separates the records is their scope — with *Bar Scene* more grandiose in the scale of its lyrical journeys.

Bryan's ability to capture the essence of everyday experiences stands out sharply on this effort — his lyrics are poignant yet relatable, offering a vivid glimpse into the struggles and triumphs of ordinary people. As the album's name implies, these narratives of hope and despair echo through dimly lit bars and quiet streets of dead and dying small-town America. While the best these areas have to offer is behind them, what remains resonates with undeniable candor and emotional truth. Under this pain are soothing folk guitars and lo-fi instrumental melodies to guide the listener along the ride.

*The Great American Bar Scene* is evocative in its commitment to its premise. While some stories stick better than others, the overall album delivery paints the picture of an America in mourning, finding its best self in the intimacy of small talk and empty bottles. — Nathaniel Clark

**Linda Thompson**

*Proxy Music*  
Storysound Records



Initially, Linda Thompson was renowned for her collaborations with her husband, former Fairport Convention member Richard Thompson. The Thompsons released significant albums together (and separately) establishing them as folk-rock royalty, with Linda as queen. Her voice was often noted as one of the genre's most celebrated. *Proxy Music* is her only release in over a decade. The use of the word "proxy" here isn't just a sassy pun, but defines the recording itself. Years ago Thompson was diagnosed with spasmodic dysphonia which left her voice strangled. For this release, Thompson gathered family and close friends to sing her songs on her behalf. These pieces are steeped in tradition. Its most important track, the waltzy "The Solitary Traveler," reflects on a life which doesn't mirror Linda's, yet the sentiment "I had a voice clear and true... but now that voice is gone" reads like a self-written epitaph.



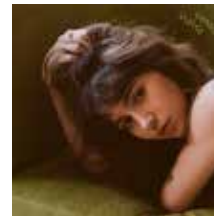
The English ballad "Mudlark" sung by The Rails (featuring her children) is sweet in its simplicity and as memorable as McCartney's "Blackbird." Harmonies among families are often the most celestial, which Linda acknowledges in her curtsy before other imperials The Roches, The Wainwrights, The Watersons, and others in the track "Those Damn Roches." This album rings clear with Thompson's voice, not just echoes. — Melissa Sullivan Shimek

**Clairo**

*Charm*  
Self-Released



Clairo is more than just a flash in the pan. You may not have heard that specific allegation against her recently, but you've certainly heard the one about her being an "industry plant," or the one about her sophomore album *Sling* as being glorified background music. And while those things may or may not be true, it's relieving to see singer-songwriter Claire Cottrill return with a self-released third album with a purpose. By splitting the difference between her debut's imitable songwriting and *Sling's* warm, lo-fi production, Clairo's third album *Charm* strongly signals that she's here to stay.



*Charm* also signals an evolution in her songwriting. Where the younger songwriter might have been timid in the past or avoided unusual topics in indie music, Cottrill boldly claims her right to be young and adventurous. Lead single "Sexy to Someone" is a perfect example, allowing Cottrill to let down her hair and sing about being wanted against upbeat piano and vintage-sounding mellotrons. She expands on this desire later in "Juna," when she sings, "You make me wanna try on a new dress/You make me wanna slip off a new dress." *Charm* isn't just a sensual album, but a comfortable one, and an album that makes sense of all the sounds and identities Clairo has tried on before arriving here. It's one of the smoothest listens of the year. — Aaron Mook

**Spades**

*Maiden Voyage*  
Self-released

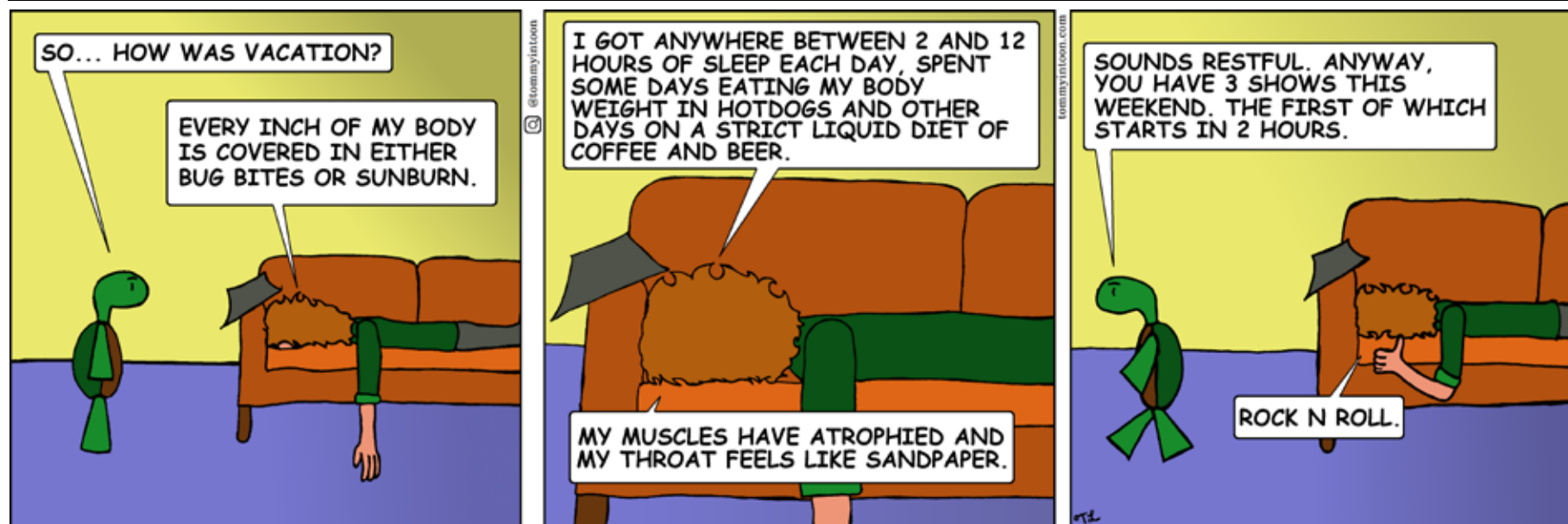


The debut EP from one of Erie's favorite bands captures the free-flow-



ing energy and infectious grooves they're known for. Whether you're seeing them live or listening to them here, listeners can thoroughly tell that they're having a blast doing what they're doing. Formed by singer Shelby Conkling and guitarist Matthew Patti in late 2019, the duo evolved into a full band post-pandemic, arriving at their signature sound. After the tragic passing of both bassist Curtis Palicia and drummer George Tanner in 2022 and 2023 respectively, Spades continues to celebrate their bandmates' lifelong love of music, grateful for everything each of their members have taught them. Blending the genres of classic rock, jam, funk, and more, each of the five tracks gives the listener more and more (though we should clarify that it's technically nine tracks, albeit with three radio edits and two alternate versions included). Recorded by Brian Glomsky at BFE studios, the results are filled with spaced-out dance numbers that will be sure to get your head bobbing at the very least. Massively entertaining, occasionally theatrical, and sincerely fun, *Maiden Voyage* suits Spades well. — Nick Warren

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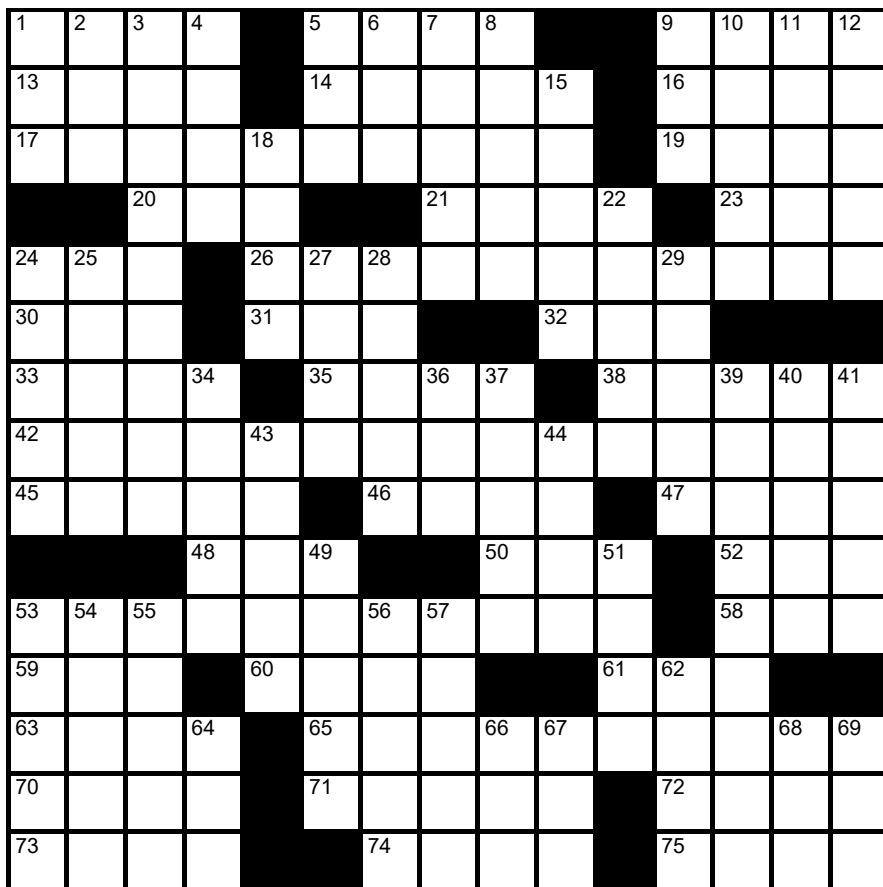


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# CROSSWORD



## Across

1. Playbill roster
5. "Pardon me"
9. Call partner?
13. Classic New Yorker cartoonist Peter
14. Confusion
16. Shakespeare's river
17. Her latest album is 2020's "Fetch the Bolt Cutters"
19. Zeus's wife
20. Actor Wheaton
21. Rent-\_\_\_ (airport-adjacent service)
23. Sat \_\_\_ (GPS system)
24. Binge
26. Unofficial title for Stuart Sutcliffe or Pete Best
30. Frequent site for athletic injuries
31. CIO's partner
32. Word before Faithful or school
33. Word on a gift card
35. Remarked
38. Picture in a dream
42. Underground signal carrier, maybe
45. Her "Hello" is used in the new "Weird" AI polka medley
46. Herb used in some ritual burnings
47. Element #10
48. Sheep sound
50. Category
52. Monopoly quad, for short

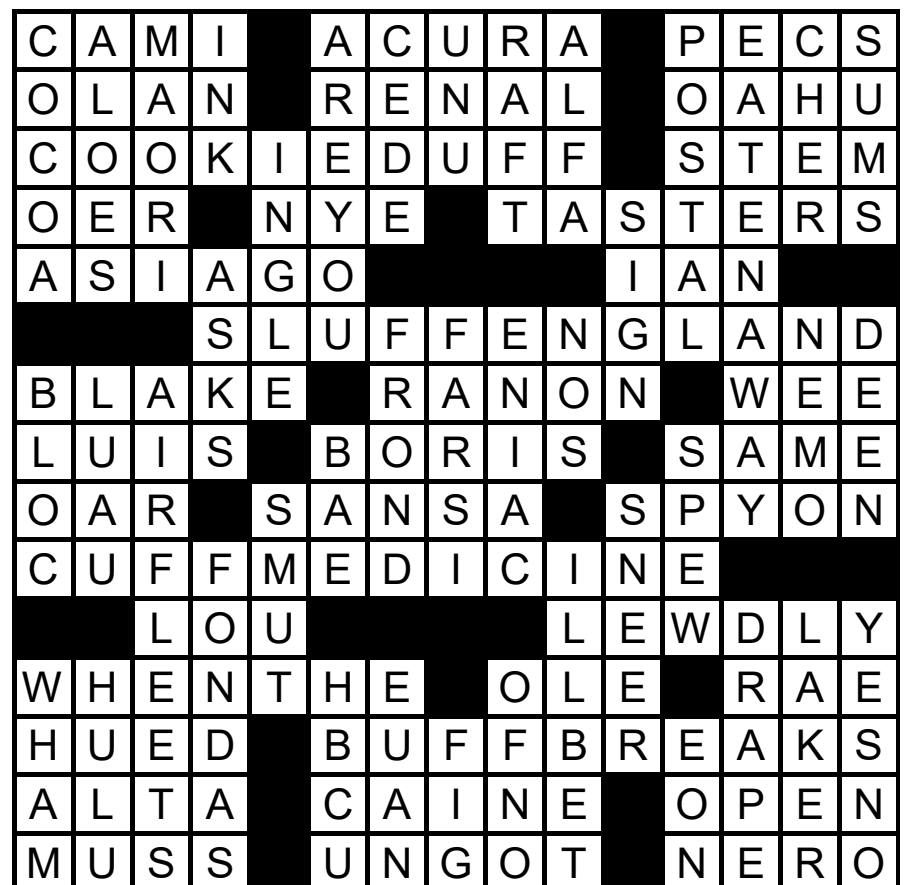
53. Culmination of a hero-versus-villain arc
58. Pinstriped baseball team, on scoreboards
59. Indignation
60. Pasture mom
61. Seoul-based automaker
63. Medicine bottle with "in"
70. "CÙmo \_\_\_ usted?"
71. Brightly colored aquarium fish
72. Enjoy some jerky
73. Display
74. Basketballer O'Neal who cohosts "Lucky 13"
75. Park in London

## Down

1. Half-\_\_\_ latte
2. Shapiro who hosted the latest season of "The Mole"
3. Paperweight that gets shaken
4. "Beloved" novelist Morrison
5. Reddit Q&A feature, for short
6. Trending
7. Person living abroad, informally
8. Garden ground cover
9. "A Christmas Carol" outburst
10. Big do
11. Reef component
12. Rapsallion
15. Singer Bryson who duetted on "A Whole New World" (the version that hit #1)
18. \_\_\_ Romeo (sports car)
22. Memento of the past
24. Mediterranean port city
25. Pungent
27. "In that case ..."
28. Moves, as wings
29. Madison Ave. exec, stereotypically
34. Peach dessert name
36. Give \_\_\_ chance
37. 7, but not 77
39. Civil rights activist and King mentor Ralph
40. High praise
41. Minuscule, cutely
43. Territory
44. Honeycomb compartment
49. To the rear, nautically
51. Actress Palmer
53. Till bills
54. Like James Joyce
55. "That's swell"
56. Spring sign
57. Tithing amount
62. Pruritus
64. It's practiced as an occupation
66. Time of history
67. Answer section?
68. Light bulb variety
69. Source of milk for pecorino cheese



## Answers to last puzzle





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