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LOOKING BACK AT 2020

THE POLITICS, THE CULTURE, AND WHAT WE'LL REMEMBER ABOUT A YEAR WE'D LIKE TO FORGET

ERIE READER

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From the Editors

A Charlie Brown 2020

Is it just us or have the '20s not seemed so fun this time around? Of course, we don't have anyone on staff who can *directly* compare 2020 to 1920, but the mental stock images of flappers and speakeasies and jiving to big band jazz certainly stand in stark contrast to the nightmare we've witnessed with our own eyes this year.

Where their major pandemic (1918 Spanish flu) was ending, ours (COVID-19) was just beginning.

Where their society grappled with the impact of Prohibition in the flu's aftermath (by drinking anyway), our much different and plugged-in society continues to grapple (and gamble) with ongoing restrictions in COVID-19's midst.

As we push 2020 back into its little corner of space-time and look at it more critically, perhaps its branches will not look so barren. We've learned a lot about ourselves and one another, how to adapt to circumstances, and in some cases shine in spite of them. We may be sagging from their heavy burden now, but given the benefits of time and perspective, more nuance may begin to fill it out.

Where they were uplifted by the granting of women's suffrage through the Nineteenth Amendment, we've been dragged down by attempts at voter suppression and misguided accusations of voter fraud.

Unless you count *Tiger King*, the 21st century '20s haven't really had much of a chance to roar yet — although it's offered plenty of occasion to scream. Nonetheless no year, even 2020, is all good or all bad. Sure, there were tragedies — societal and personal. But interspersed within those tragedies were triumphs both collective (e.g., multiple highly effective vaccines developed within a year) and individual — for some of us, perhaps just the privilege of waking up to live and fight another day. *It's a Christmas Miracle, Charlie Brown!*

As we push 2020 back into its little corner of space-time and look at it more critically, perhaps its branches will not look so barren. We've learned a lot about ourselves and one another, how to adapt to circumstances, and in some cases shine in spite of them. We may be sagging from their heavy burden now, but given the benefits of time and perspective, more nuance may begin to fill it out. The multiple Year in Review retrospectives at the core of this issue address many events for which we cannot yet fully know the consequences.

Until then, we have a Christmas and New Year's to celebrate — albeit more quietly than most. To make up for that, we've collected a sleighful of the year's best books, movies, music, and TV to help you and your immediate households bridge the gap between a trying 2020 and, hopefully, a much, much better 2021. Happy holidays Reader readers, from us to you.

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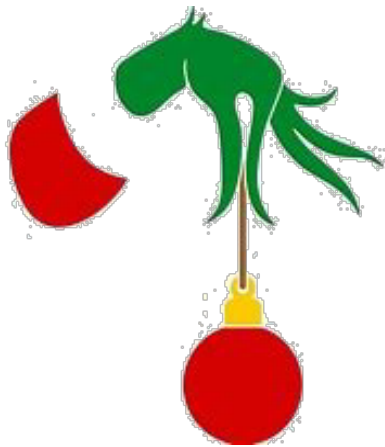


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Erie at Large: Politics, Interrupted

How Erie County went blue again, amidst the tumultuous factors of 2020



President-Elect Joe Biden emerged from a crowded field to represent the Democrats in November's general election. Although the key battleground state of Pennsylvania, including Erie County, tipped blue in the presidential race, a true "blue wave" has not come to bear, as Republicans retain majority control of the Pa. House and Senate.

erings of 50 or more people across the United States, and the following day the nation's chief public health expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, revised that recommendation to limit gatherings to 10 people or fewer.

The United States led the world in active coronavirus cases by the end of March and electoral politics were all but on hold. Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf rescheduled the state's primary election from April 28 to June 2.

Coincidentally, March 13 was also the day that Louisville, Kentucky police kicked in the apartment door of a 26-year-old African American woman, Breonna Taylor, while serving a "no-knock" search warrant. Police entered, firing several shots and killing Taylor in the process.

Taylor's death came just weeks after three white men pursued and fatally shot Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed 25-year-old-black man, in Glynn County, Georgia, and two months before the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer who pinned Floyd to the ground with a knee on Floyd's neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds as Floyd begged for his life.

These incidents reignited the Black Lives Matter movement that began in 2014 in response to the deaths of African Americans at the hands of police. Between the end of May and the end of August, more than 10,600 protests were organized across the country, including in Erie, making police reform and human rights a central focus of 2020 campaigns at all levels of government.

"All Politics are Local"

Despite Pennsylvania's importance in the presidential elections, its place on the primary election calendar has long been a point of contention for those close to the process because the Commonwealth plays a generally less significant role in the selection of party nominees. 2020 was no different. Only nine states voted after Pennsylvania and, of those, only New York had more

delegates to award.

Ballots in Erie County included the presidential contest — Biden, Sanders, and Rep. Tulsi Gabbard were on the ballot, although Sanders and Gabbard had previously suspended their campaigns — and Pennsylvania row offices for attorney general, auditor general, and state treasurer, a representative in Congress, as well as State Senate and State Representatives.

Outside of the presidential race, only the Democratic nomination for auditor general and the Democratic nomination for State Senate were contested primary races in Erie County. Former deputy mayor of Philadelphia, Nina Ahmad, handily emerged from a pool of six candidates in a statewide race to be the Democratic nominee for auditor general, and locally Julie Slomski defeated County Councilman Andre Horton to challenge incumbent Republican Dan Laughlin for the 49th District State Senate seat.

Because Erie had voted for Donald Trump in 2016 but had historically voted for Democrats in presidential contests (with the exception of 1984), the national and international press looked to Erie County as a bellwether for Pennsylvania and the nation.

Press from as far away as Brussels and Japan, and major publications including *The Guardian* and *Der Spiegel*, made their way to Northwestern Pennsylvania in an attempt to distill the political landscape into a narrative that matched the importance placed on Erie County when at the end of 2019 *The Hill* named it one of the ten most important counties in America to the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.

In most cases, they found what they were looking for. Whether it was on Main Street in Union City or in suburban Millcreek Township, enthusiasm for this presidential election was extremely high. Almost 138,000 people voted in this election — nearly 20,000 more voters than in 2016 — due, in part, to mail-in voting, which was passed into law in 2019 by the Republican-controlled state legislature.

When the votes were counted, Joe Biden won Erie County by 1,424 votes and subsequently won Pennsylvania by nearly 81,000 votes. Both Erie County and Pennsylvania were blue again at

By: Jim Wertz

Even before the pandemic landed on American shores, 2020 was poised to be a strange political year. Amid wildfires on the West Coast, Black Lives Matter protests at home and abroad, and the passage of two articles of impeachment by the House of Representatives against President Trump, 29 Democrats lined up to compete for their party's presidential nomination. Some of them you wouldn't know had run and some you will likely never hear from again.

Maryland congressman John Delaney and entrepreneur Andrew Yang announced their candidacies in the second half of 2017, nearly two-and-a-half years before the 2020 Iowa Caucus. However, by the time we rang in 2020, only 14 Democrats remained in the race, the Democratic National Committee had already held six presidential debates, and the money and popular support began to consolidate behind Vice President Joe Biden and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

At the end of February — after Pete Buttigieg had won the Iowa Caucus and finished second in New Hampshire, and Bernie Sanders won New Hampshire and Nevada — South Carolina Rep. James Clyburn, House Majority Whip and de facto leader of his state's Democratic Party, endorsed Biden and all but guaranteed the former vice president a victory in the

South Carolina primary on Feb. 29.

Between the South Carolina primary and the 15 primary contests that comprised "Super Tuesday" on March 3, Buttigieg and Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar dropped out of the race and endorsed Biden. They were joined by former Texas congressman and presidential hopeful Beto O'Rourke, who exited the race in November 2019. Biden won 10 primaries on March 3, which led to an exodus of most remaining candidates, leaving only Biden and Sanders, who won the remaining five states on Super Tuesday, as the lone contenders for the Democratic nomination.

Most of the primary contestants had endorsed Joe Biden ahead of Wisconsin's April 7 primary. Sanders suspended his campaign the next day, and on April 13 he endorsed Biden as the Democratic Party's presumptive nominee to become the next President of the United States.

Politics, Interrupted

A national emergency was declared on March 13 as the coronavirus raged through centers of international travel like California and New York. States began to postpone their primary contests until late spring and early summer in the hope that public health officials would know more about how the virus behaves and how the American people might mitigate its spread. On March 15, the Center for Disease Control advised an eight-week moratorium on gath-

GAGE SKIDMORE

the top of the ticket.

What didn't hold in this election were Biden's coat-tails to carry down-ballot Democrats in Pennsylvania and across the country. The so-called "blue wave" stalled because of two primary factors: First, Democrats nationwide underestimated the turnout by Trump supporters in his re-election effort. Across the country, and particularly in the Midwest, Trump supporters lined up at the polls giving Trump a significant lead on Election Day. That lead, in most cases, did not hold up against the high volume of mail-in and absentee ballots delivered before Nov. 3.

The other major impediment to a Democratic sweep was the fact that moderate Republicans who joined the Biden coalition against Donald Trump were not willing to repudiate the Grand Old Party that has allowed Trump to run roughshod on the nation since 2017. Instead, they remained loyal to Republican candidates down-ballot even if they could no longer vote for the man at the top of their ticket.

As a result of the high Republican turnout and the failure to convert and capitalize on the moderate Republican

support for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, Republicans Tim DeFoor and Stacy Garrity defeated, respectively, Democrats Nina Ahmad and Joe Torsella for the statewide offices of auditor general and state treasurer.

Democrats in Erie County also failed to capture the 49th District State Senate seat held by Republican Dan Laughlin, a popular incumbent who was generally perceived by the electorate as a moderate voice in a partisan legislature. Since the election, however, Laughlin joined with Pennsylvania Senate Republicans to file an *Amicus Curiae* brief with the U.S. Supreme Court in a since-dismissed case by the State of Texas — the most recent in a litany of frivolous lawsuits attempting to undermine the United States Constitution and overturn the results of the 2020 election.

His challenger, Julie Slomski, charged during the campaign that Laughlin was little more than a Republican pawn who voted with a partisan agenda that favored Trumpism and its destabilizing idiosyncrasies. That charge fell on deaf ears throughout the 49th District in Erie County. Since joining

the ranks of Trump's enablers, however, it remains to be seen whether or not Laughlin will continue to hold the trust of Erie voters through a second term.

In the race for the 16th Congressional District, political newcomer Kristy Gnibus, a Democrat, could not take down five-term Republican incumbent Mike Kelly despite defeating him in Erie County and outperforming the Biden/Harris ticket in every 16th District county — Erie, Crawford, Mercer, Lawrence, and Butler. High turnout in this still Republican-heavy district made this contest unwinnable for Democrats, who have only held this seat for one term from 2009-2011.

In spite of the district and statewide losses, Democrats performed well in Erie County. Attorney General Josh Shapiro held his place as the top vote-getter in Erie County — followed by Gnibus and Biden — as he did in his first campaign for attorney general four years ago. Shapiro also earned the most votes of any candidate statewide.

Third District State Representative Ryan Bizarro, facing the only challenge for a state house race in Erie

County, easily defeated Republican Greg Hayes, who earned his way onto the general election ballot by way of a write-in campaign after having his primary nominating petitions voided by a state court for mass forgery of voter signatures. Bizarro retained his seat with Erie County's largest statistical victory in the 2020 election cycle.

Throughout the 2020 campaign and the many trials that followed, good people stood up for democracy, organizing and working on behalf of candidates who believe in the Constitution and the rule of law.

Despite the shame brought upon the good people of the Commonwealth by Rep. Mike Kelly and his relentless pursuit of nothing as the primary litigant of Trump's non-legal challenges to every court in the land, when the national and international press return to dissect this election there will be but one story to tell: Erie County went blue.

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

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Addressing Honorary Streets

How renaming is one way to recognize special Erie people



LIZ ALLEN

By: Liz Allen

When Evan Torres asked me in December 2019 if the city of Erie could rename a street to honor his friend, Phillip “Scotty” Askins Sr., an “asset to the community,” I was flummoxed.

As a member of Erie City Council, I could uncover no rules about how to rename streets. Nor could I find a master list of renamed streets at City Hall. I also had questions. Should honorees be household names? Figures from Erie history? Did you have to be a long time Erieite to rate for a street name or did temporary residence count?

I remembered the brouhaha in 1995 when Erie Mayor Joyce Savocchio rechristened East Ninth and French streets as “Eiji Oue Way,” to honor the charismatic conductor from Japan who led the Erie Philharmonic for five years before leaving Erie for the Minnesota Orchestra.

I recalled that some people were upset when City Council voted in 1998 to rename part of East 18th Street, between State to German, as “Erma Lindsey Boulevard,” in honor of a noted local civil rights leader. Residents on East 18th Street feared that their mail would get mixed-up, but the new street name was honorary, not

an official change for the U.S. Postal Service.

I knew that in 2012, the corner of East Third and French streets had belatedly been renamed “Harry T. Burleigh Way,” to honor the famed African-American composer whose family homestead at 137 E. Third St. had been demolished without regard for the history it represented.

And I realized that in November 2018, I had joined my City Council colleagues to rename Poplar Street, between West 26th and West 29th streets, as “Florindo ‘Flo’ Fabrizio Way,” in honor of the well-liked state legislator who had lost his battle with pancreatic cancer in July that year.

I’m guessing that a lot of Erie folks are familiar with the names I just cited, and my unofficial compilation of other honorary street names includes politicians and community leaders whose names you would easily recognize.

Phillip Askins Jr., left, is now involved in His Shining Lights, the group founded by his late father, Phillip “Scotty” Askins Sr., to provide Thanksgiving meals and other services to people in need in Erie. Askins Sr. directed much of his charitable work to the neighborhood near Farrell’s Superette, the corner store he owned for 35 years at the corner of West Fourth and Chestnut streets in Erie’s West Bayfront neighborhood.

The trend toward renaming parts of Erie streets to honor luminaries in the community began when Erie Mayor Joyce Savocchio decided to rename the corner of East Ninth and French streets after Eiji Oue, who served as music director of the Erie Philharmonic from 1990 to 1995.

The late Phillip “Scotty” Askins Sr. may not be as well-known as some of them.

But his story is worth sharing, especially now, when we can all use a boost of inspiration to get us through the cold days of winter during a pandemic.

Torres was living in the 500 block of West Fifth Street when he got to know Askins and his wife, Joyce, who owned Farrell’s Superette at the corner of West Fourth and Chestnut streets. “He ran the little mom-and-pop grocery store and I frequented the store for years,” said Torres, who now lives on Erie’s east side.

Scotty Askins had grown up across the street from the store, starting there as a stock boy at age 16 when it was a meat market, according to a 2016 Erie Times-News story.

But Askins had other jobs — including serving in the U.S.

Army and working at Erie Malleable Iron — before he bought the store and operated it with his wife for 35 years, until they sold it in 2016 because of his illness.

By then, Askins was beloved in the neighborhood. “Everybody down there is family,” Askins told the Times-News when he made the hard decision to sell.

Askins founded a ministry, His Shining Lights, which held a free Thanksgiving dinner every year at the nearby Martin Luther King Jr. Center. “He and his family members did that, with the help of his church,” said Torres. “It ran like clockwork, because of the contacts he had.” The dinner guests weren’t just from the neighborhood, he said. “It was a fellowship of people within the city, anywhere in the city,” he said. Church choirs sang. Fraternity groups set up and then tore down for the dinner. “He made it happen. He never forgot his neighbors and he took ownership of it,” Torres said.

From January into the summer, Askins also organized monthly soup nights. He do-

nated extra food to the daycare program at the MLK Center and to a low-income housing complex. He enlisted friends from small businesses, including Larry’s Central Market, Serafin’s Food Market, Dominick’s restaurant and Tripifoods, for help with his food programs.

He organized a community garden. He put together Christmas parties at nursing homes. He sponsored a neighborhood barbeque.

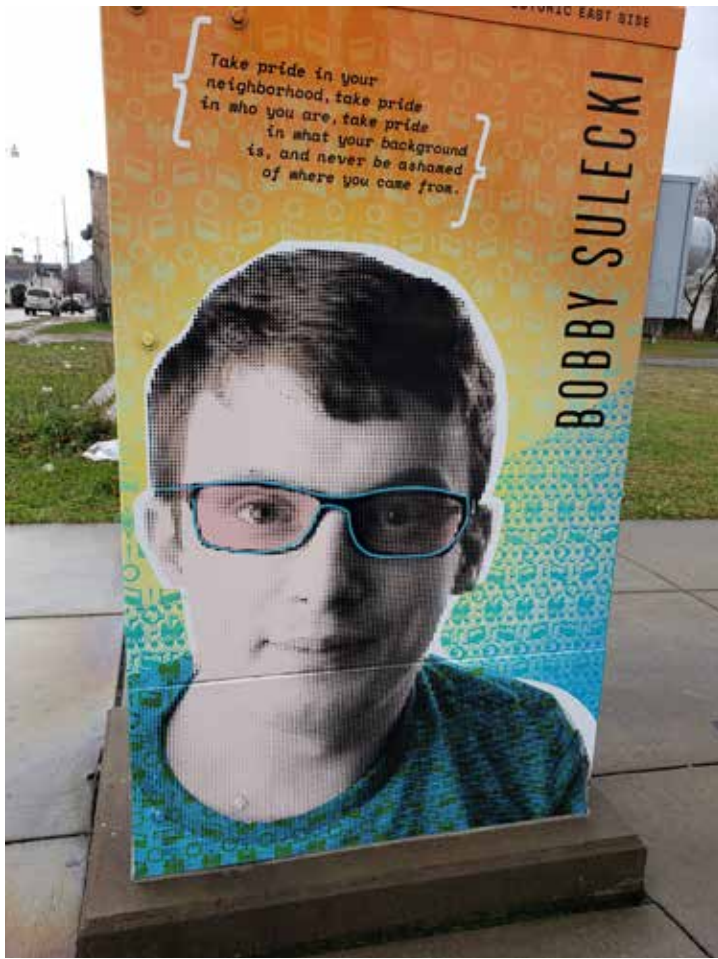
At the store itself, he tended to his customers, said Torres. “He extended credit to the neighbors, his customers, he took care of them,” Torres added.

When he became too ill to operate the store in 2016, neighbors spread the word that the market was for sale. When he sold his store in July 2016 to Binder Singh, Askins threw a free farewell Italian dinner for the neighborhood, at the MLK Center to say goodbye.

Torres likes the expression that “it takes a village” to help a community, but he also points out that one person can make a difference. “I think that is what I’ve learned from knowing him.



LIZ ALLEN



Erie Arts & Culture has promoted a visual way to honor ordinary people who make Erie a strong community, with a portrait project on utility boxes along major thoroughfares in Erie. Bobby Sulecki, who documents Erie's Polish history, is featured on a box at E. 11th and Parade streets

It's true that it does take a village, but one person in that village can motivate everybody," he said.

In leading by example, Askins exemplified the character that makes Erie special, said Torres. "Erie is a rally town," he said. "When something happens, they rally around the underdog," he said, which is why he hopes others will rally to rename part of West Fourth and Chestnut streets after Askins.

In fact, Askins is the type of person that Erie Arts & Culture has in mind with its commitment to highlight the contributions of ordinary people to lifting Erie up. "We often imagine philanthropists to be those giving six-figure checks," said Pat-

rick Fisher, executive director of Erie Arts & Culture. "We neglect to publicly celebrate those everyday individuals who get up every day not out of duty but out of passion." When someone like Scotty Askins organizes a free annual Thanksgiving dinner, that's an act done out of both passion and compassion, he said.

Torres certainly persuaded me that a street-corner bearing his name would be one way to honor Scotty Askins, who died on June 12, 2019.

And when that honor occurs, it won't be the first time that City Council has honored Askins. I learned this from his obituary: "His first service award was at the age of 17 by City Council, when he saved the life of a girl who was on fire."

Liz Allen wrote a column about "ordinary people" for 15 years at the Erie Times-News. You can reach her at lizallenerie@gmail.com.

Explore More

Want to learn more about a diverse group of Erie people, often unheralded, who have made our community a better place?

Then visit Discovery Trail, the newest public art project by Erie Arts & Culture, in which Erie artists Jackie Quigley, Nick Warren, Scott Gladd, and Brigitte Davitt have created 24 portraits and illustrations on vinyl wraps that have been installed on utility boxes along State Street, Parade Street and East 26th Street.

Don't just drive by the art. Get out and read the stories of these good souls, such as Bobby Sulecki, who is documenting the history of Erie's Polish community. His advice, on the utility box at East 11th and Parade streets, says: "Take pride in your neighborhood, take pride in who you are, take pride in what your background is, and never be ashamed of where you came from."

LIZ ALLEN

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What Will We Remember About 2020?

Contemplating what will stay with us, what will fade away



It goes without saying that we will be thinking about the impacts of this year — and the pandemic — for generations to come. With so many dubious milestones to choose from, what will stick out the most? Will we be able to recall distinct moments, or just that our lives changed in ways many of us never expected?

the time, nearly 3,000 people would die that day. While I don't remember the exact day with exact details like I did in the moment when the carnage was unfolding on live TV, I do remember wondering then: Did I even know 3,000 people? Like, shook-their-hand-know-them?

The enormity of that singular moment of death clung to me throughout the coming years. It still does. And as I've grown older, I've wondered what other *I remember whens* I might enter into the catalogue.

Because, of course, my parents, baby boomers, had also lived through the attacks on Sept. 11, and the longest U.S.-involved wars to follow. And their parents, the Greatest Generation, had lived through the Kennedy assassination, the '60s, and the Vietnam War as well.

As it stands, I can't yet say whether I'll remember with the same precision the details of Thursday, Dec. 10, 2020 as I do Tuesday, Sept. 11., 2001.

What I will remember, though, is sitting at my computer, deleting most of the draft of a Year-in-Review look-back at the toll of the COVID-19 pandemic my editor had asked me to write for the year-end issue. I'll remember being crushed by a record number on a record day that likely won't hold that record for long.

That number: 3,011. Which came a week after 2,885, which, in turn, had come eight months after 2,752. In between, nearly 290,000.

That is the death toll from the COVID-19 pandemic in the

United States — the single-day record of deaths in the United States as it stands on Thursday, Dec. 11 at the time I am re-writing this story; the single-day record of deaths in the United States set the week prior; the single-day record of deaths in the United States set in April; and, the number of deaths that have occurred in the United States in between April's record date and December's.

In terms of mass-casualty days in United States history, the Great Galveston Storm of 1900 remains at the top at 8,000. Second, the Battle of Antietam in 1862.

Then, it was 9/11. But at 3,011, more people died in a single day from COVID-19 on Dec. 10, 2020 than those who died during the terrorist attacks on U.S. soil in September 2001.

Will we remember 12/10 the same way we remember 9/11? As the December 2020 COVID-19 death toll crowds the top-10 list of mass-casualty dates, it's hard to tell whether we'll remember 12/10 or 12/11 or 12/12 or ...

Looking back to Sept. 16, 2020, when I filed a story about how COVID-19 is impacting our lives, the way we live, and our livelihoods, which would run one week later, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported 194,092 COVID-19-related deaths in America. Total confirmed cases, at that date, stood at 6.5 million.

By the time the story was published, the numbers had gone up.

Today, those deaths in the U.S. are at 295,450, up 101,358 in just under 3 months. The total confirmed cases are up 9.2 million in the U.S., from 6.5 to 15.7 in the same period.

Then, Pennsylvania, with its 151,081 confirmed positive cases, ranked 12th highest amongst the states and territories. Nearly 8,000 had proven

By: Ben Speggen

Along our journey in life, impactful historical mile markers tend to set the generational tone of our collective trek. For my grandparents, who were either learning to crawl or were taking their first steps during the Great Depression, it was World War II, irrespective of the few-year age gap between them. For their children, my parents, their awareness of a bigger, wider world beyond themselves indelibly shifted the day Lee Harvey Oswald ascended to the sixth floor of the Texas Book Depository in Dallas to shoot and kill President John F. Kennedy, and continued through the '60s and into the Vietnam War.

My father turned 17 just a few months after the Selective Service announced that there'd be no further draft calls for U.S. men to report for duty to service in the Vietnam War. But still, high school friends, relatives, and friends he'd make later in life were called upon and did serve. And the war did weigh heavy on him through them and generational shar-

ing of sadness, anger, anxiety, regret, and frustration. I often wonder how the weight might've been different if he carried it himself.

While both of my grandfathers were drafted in WWII, only one actively served overseas, seeing early conflict from Normandy inward across the European Continent. The other was the second to last to be drafted from his small Southwestern Pennsylvania town. He went to basic training in Biloxi, Mississippi, not knowing whether the war would welcome him one or two oceans away. It didn't. Being born just five years after my older grandfather made all the difference in his world.

Yet, both saw the world through the same bifocal view: The Depression, and The War. Only their prescriptions were different.

Growing up, I remember hearing the shared intro to the same big stories that featured the same big elements with minor details differing: I remember when, I remember where...

I remember when Pearl Harbor was bombed... I remember where I was when Kennedy

was shot... I remember...

I remember wondering if, or when, I'd have a *I remember...* generationally-shared life moment.

A month before I turned 17, growing up in a small, Southwestern Pennsylvania town, I hadn't given the Middle East much thought. If you'd had asked me to point out Saudi Arabia, or Afghanistan, or Iraq on a map, I might've been confident in getting one, if any at all, of those right. My age and interests had much more to do with that ignorance than my location or high school history lessons.

But I can tell you that I remember where I was when I first heard that American Airlines Flight 11 struck the northern tower of the World Trade Center. And I can remember, with vivid detail, when United Airlines Flight 175, at 9:03 a.m., collided with its southern sister tower. And just over a half-hour later when American Airlines Flight 77 hit the Pentagon. And at 10:03 a.m. when United Airlines Flight 93 dropped from the skies in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

While we didn't know it at

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fatal, where the state ranked ninth overall.

Since then, Pennsylvania, with a total population just shy of 13 million, added 312,094 positive cases, totaling 463,175. Deaths total over 12,000.

To put that in the context of Erie County, that's near the equivalent of losing the borough of Edinboro and Summit Township combined.

In Erie, when I wrote that piece in September, there had been 1,439 positive cases reported and 37 deaths confirmed. Today, those numbers are 7,667 and 111, respectively.

In three months, that's 6,228 more positive cases and 74 additional deaths.

Put another way, from the onset of the pandemic in mid-March through the middle of September, Erie County had reported an average of roughly 240 positive cases per month and just six deaths.

In the span of the last three months, Erie County's average are now 2,076 positive cases per month and just shy of 25 deaths per month.

Where are we headed from here? That depends on what changes — from our personal choices governing our behavior, to the orders, directives, and measures executed by those we've collectively chosen to govern us.

As we close out the year, we find ourselves experiencing more COVID-19 cases and deaths while we have fewer restrictions on our lives than we did in April with more restrictions and fewer deaths.

What does this all add up to if we're to make sense of 2020, reviewing the year of the pandemic?

Perhaps that's best answered by asking: What will we remember most from this year?

Will we remember a particular day for a particular reason? A week? A month? The entire year?

Will that thing we remember be the first reported cases of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States in February? Or, locally, the first cases report-

ed in Erie County in March? Or will we be thinking of this globally, what it's meant worldwide?

Will we remember the first celebrities to report positive COVID-19 results, like when Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson did in March? Or will we remember the latest celebrities, such as Ellen DeGeneres, who announced her condition via a tweeted screenshot?

Will we remember when none of us could find Clorox wipes on the shelves? Or will we remember when our commander-in-chief pondered aloud whether injecting bleach might help fight off the virus?

Will we remember when we learned to make sourdough bread at home, or will we remember the eyes above the mask of the cashier who rung us out at the grocer when we bought the yeast, the same eyes that saw throngs of yeast-purchasing patrons, sometimes-not-always six-feet apart, pass through their checkout lines during one of many eight-hour shifts?

Will we remember when we cut our own hair for the first time? When we got our first professional haircut while wearing a mask? When we made the decision not to get a haircut at all?

Or, will we remember our first takeout? Or how many times we ordered UberEats, putting someone else to the task of fetching our food and transporting it to us so that we didn't have to feel unsafe leaving our homes? What was it that we ate on Monday? Did we finish it, or did it end up in the trash?

Will we remember the first restaurant patio we revisited when restrictions and mitigations were lifted? Was it a pilsner or an IPA we sipped when we felt a little risky — or was that the feeling of liberation? Did we leave a tip? Is 20 percent still enough? Will we remember when we decided to do it again, or go back to just delivery or takeout?

Will we remember when

our favorite local business announced their online shopping portal? Or that they were going to wait it out? Or when they opened, how they opened? Or when they closed, and whether it was temporary or permanent?

Will we remember when we taught ourselves the ukulele in April, or the kindergarten teacher in September juggling a Zoom window full of students struggling to pay attention? Or the student whose face wasn't on screen because they didn't have the right tech or enough bandwidth?

Will we remember scouring home-improvement stores for deep-freezers to start stocking up? Or will we remember the make-shift tractor-trailer morgues parked outside of hospitals that couldn't process the dead quickly enough?

Will we remember which governor imposed which restrictions? Lifted them? Re-imposed them? Tested positive for the coronavirus? Or when other elected officials tested positive? Or when that New Hampshire speaker of the house died from it?

Will we remember when we learned the definition of essential worker and whether or not what we do is viewed as essential? Will we remember when we, or someone we know and love, was furloughed, that their line of work didn't work out during a pandemic?

And what did we do with that government-issued one-time stimulus of \$1,200? Did we use that for the yeast? Or the Eats? Or did that go towards the rent, the electric, the gas to power the stove to bake the bread, the gas in the car to drive to our next shift standing behind plexiglass, checking out the yeast-buyers, the buy-in-bulk purchases, the return-shoppers who bought a half-gallon of milk on Monday and are back Tuesday because they're thirsty shoppers?

Will we get another stimulus? Why was it just once? How much impact does 133 bucks — \$1200 divided over 9 months —

really have?

Will unemployment benefits be extended? Will the U.S. government pass a budget before year's end?

Will those who can't make their rent or their mortgage receive more help? Are they on their own?

Will we remember when bars were reopened then closed again? When in-person schooling resumed, then went virtual again?

Is there anything left from that initial check? Did we put a few hundred bucks in savings? Do we have any savings left? Did we have any to start with before the pandemic?

Can we remember what, when, and how...?

And why? Why should we remember? And who? Who have we — will we — remember? Will we remember ourselves in the moment, the moments?

Will we remember the 3,011 lost souls and the day it happened? The numbers — the souls reflected in but sterilized by data points — that came before? Those after, and if so when? And when we hoped it would stop, became numb to it, knew someone who died from it?

Will we remember 2020 collectively or month-by-month? What happened in the pre-pandemic months? Surely, there were the usual normal life occurrences. The losses — the non-COVID-related deaths, divorces, demotions. The gains — the births, the marriages, the job promotions. And the mundane — when was it that the novelty wore off and the boredom crept back, followed by hints of more anxiety, moaning like an alley cat at night?

Will we remember 2020 at its end? The race to roll out a vaccine? The mounting worry over whether hospitals large and small, urban and rural can keep up with the climbing numbers of those in need of ICU care, to be put on ventilators?

Will we remember 2020 for the politics? Were we always-maskers, or never-maskers? Or masks-but-only-

when...?

Will we remember this as the year we trusted or distrusted science? Trusted or distrusted democracy?

The shock of the singular moments that leave us in awe — the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the attacks on the World Trade Center Towers — leave us little choice in the matter when it comes to remembering. Few of us consciously made the decision to make the memory; instead, the moment's tremors ran deep enough to leave a lasting impact.

While we waited in fear for another attack on U.S. soil, both after Pearl Harbor and Sept. 11, the follow-ups never came. Yet, the trends suggest that more Dec. 10s are on the horizon in 2020 and into 2021.

Because of the continuous nature of the COVID-19 crises — the public health crisis, the economic crisis, the fill-in-the-blank-with-an-adjective-personal-to-you crisis, as the pandemic has upended our way of living — we are living through an unrelenting series of singular moments. Whether we remember them — the names of the dead, the names of the living, the decisions we made, and the things we did or are doing — is our choice.

Likewise, we will have choices in 2021: To continue to practice adaptive behaviors for our own personal safety and the collective good; or, to not — and to give up in search of going back. To be vaccinated; or not to be vaccinated.

These are the questions. And the moments to which they are attached will be of importance to each generation living through the *I remember when in 2020*, and onwards into the next in search of the *I remember post-COVID-19* future.

The online edition of this article contains some additional content. Ben Speggen can be contacted at bSpeggen@ErieReader.com, and you can follow him on Twitter @BenSpeggen



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2020 Monolithic in Its Challenge

But Erie demonstrates resourcefulness, resilience to carry on



Even before mysterious monoliths began surfacing around the world, life this year had felt alien. But despite historic challenges and disruptions to our status quo, Erieites were among the human lifeforms who found ways to adapt and persevere during what some may call 2020: *A Suck Odyssey*.

- In January, an Erie man was sentenced to up to 23 months in prison and one year of probation for staging his own kidnapping, which had involved a “kidnapper” duct-taping him to a chair in order to collect “ransom money” from his fiancée. We hope they get to tie the knot soon.
- An apt analogy for the serious dents 2020 has left in our collective psyche — amidst a domestic dispute this April, an Erie road rager was charged for repeatedly ramming a woman’s car with his truck.

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Although these petty misdeeds are certainly to be frowned upon (or *however* the aliens might express disapproval — acid drool or perhaps inflating some kind of indignation pouch?), they are nowhere near as contemptible as what transpired on the evening of Saturday, May 30. That night, a peaceful protest of police brutality in the death of George Floyd devolved into a full-scale riot, damaging several Downtown Erie businesses and injuring several people. Perhaps the ugliest and most indelible moment occurred when a riot control officer kicked unarmed, seated 21-year-old Hannah Silbaugh to the ground — a visual circulated widely in the aftermath.

It would hardly be the last unsightly scene from a year fraught with social and political tensions, as racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic sentiments bubbled to the fore. A public park vandalized with racial epithets. Highly disrespectful, sexist comments made during a Erie City Council meeting. Numerous insensitive memes and remarks made at the expense of the very capable Pennsylvania Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine (a trans woman).

If this was all we had to show for ourselves, we’d be in trouble. But thankfully for us and our molecular constitutions, we have many more examples of good that *should* spare us from any potential integration rays.

Column B: On Second Thought, We’ll Keep Our Molecules, Thank You

Despite all the evidence of self-sabotage I’ve presented so far, here’s why I’m hopeful we (hypothetically) won’t be vaporized.

- Early on in the pandemic, the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) established a \$2.35 million COVID-19 Response Fund consisting of three components — an Immediate Human Relief Fund (benefiting low-income, homeless, and vulnerable populations), a Small Business Loan Program, and Civic Institution Deferred In-

By: Matt Swanseger

So...what y’all wearing when the aliens get here? Surely you’ve heard about all the monoliths popping up lately — the tall, shiny columns shaped like Toblerone bars that have been spotted in Utah, Romania, California, and Texas? Well, that seems to me like a sign they’ll be here any day now, so at the very least we’d better be wearing a smile and can-do attitude — because after this latest round of shutdowns, many of us may very well be looking at our next employers.

Of course, I needn’t remind you to do your smiling from at least six feet away. This COVID-19 deal’s still dragging its feet like an old mule with a bellyful of Railbender, and Yahweh Yahweh Yahweh (as of this year, the name of an actual Erieite) only knows what kind of bugs these outworlders might be carrying. Hell, they might even *be* bugs. At any rate, remember to be courteous. *Good morning, Zanaqlorp. I gotta say, I just LOVE what you’ve done with your mandibles.*

It is with some concern that I write this, because as you and I both know, 2020 hasn’t exactly been our best showing. At times this year, our behavior as a species could be described as counterintuitive and counterproductive — what with all our bickering and in-fighting over pretty common-sense issues like “Who has the right to stay healthy?” and “Who deserves to be treated like a real person?” And to Zanaqlorp or Zeebleebop or *whatever* alien overlord is making the executive decisions, that would seem to be quite the indictment. Why shouldn’t they just zap us all and start over *tabula Roswell*?

Although I can only speak for our tiny corner of Pennsylvania, I’m going to do my best to argue that

they absolutely *should not*, but y’all gotta back me up. If you felt jilted when The Temptations and Four Tops canceled their Warner Theatre gig back in January, imagine how you’ll feel when the Xergloggians (or *whoever*) cancel Earth. If you’re able to — and I hope you are — take a few deep breaths with me and let’s run through this together.

Column A: Please, We’re Begging You, Zap Us Now

I’m going to be real with y’all, there were a number of stories to emerge from our area this year that would have any sensible sentient being scratching their head(s).

- Corry Police were able to track down a stolen bulldozer when they found the perpetrator’s hoodie at — you guessed it — the site of the stolen bulldozer. Surveillance footage from a nearby Wal-Mart showed a man wearing it the night the machine went missing, as well as his truck that had been captured on Jackson Excavating cameras that same day. A Wal-Mart receipt was still in the hoodie’s pockets. With all due respect to the investigators, this case was kind of a pushover.
- Speaking of thieving, some general tips — do not stab yourself during an attempted hijacking (as an Erie man did this August), and definitely do not wear the same sweatshirt to multiple car break-ins in a row, especially one that a November Millcreek Township Police report described as bearing the “cartoon image of a wildcat and image of a yellow star to the right.” A lucky burglary shirt is only lucky until you get caught.

come Loans. It was a sweeping gesture toward self-preservation impacting community members across the board.

- Following the announcement of Erie Community Foundation President Mike Batchelor's retirement, the organization marked its most successful Erie Gives Day to date, with \$6,358,146 pouring in from 11,482 unique donors, a resounding show of support for area nonprofits and their causes — from animal rights to human rights and everything in between. One of the most prominent of those nonprofits, the YMCA of Greater Erie, celebrated its 160th anniversary this year.
- Throughout the year, a number of grassroots efforts emerged to help keep citizens informed and protected from the novel coronavirus. Gannon University student Austin Detzel designed a Live COVID Tracker that displays a heat map of where infection rates are most concentrated. Teenage Eagle Scout Ben Grassinger devised rubber fingertip protection kits aptly branded "Give Corona the Finger." Volunteer "sew-warriors" of the Mask-Erie Facebook group handmade thousands upon thousands of cloth masks for front-line workers. Regional manufacturers banded together with Penn State Behrend to produce a new type of plastic face shield, and area distillers stepped up to compensate for a nationwide shortage of hand sanitizer, the official alcohol of 2020.
- We deepened our appreciation of hometown heroes and trailblazers. Through a series of public art murals, we honored individuals such as NFL Hall of Famer Freddie Biletnikoff, 1950 National League Rookie of the Year Sam Jethroe (who crossed over to predominantly white Major League Baseball from the Negro League), and retired Erie School District teacher and counselor Luther Manus Jr. — more tributes and more public art are forthcoming (see the Whole Foods Co-Op, for example).
- St. Vincent nurses were paid the ultimate respect when they were featured in the Marvel Comics limited release *The Vitals: True Nurse Stories*. Progressive hires like former Olympian Ian Roberts, the first African American man to serve as Millcreek School District superintendent, and Tyler Titus, the first openly transgender man to head the Erie School Board, may very well prove worthy of their own tributes in the future.
- While we're on the subject of education, Erie County, the largest statistical population area in the United States without a community college, was finally approved for one, a move that will grant affordable access to higher learning for years to come.
- Erie, this year named both a "welcoming city"

(Welcoming America) and one of the nation's "most livable small cities" (SmartAsset), continues extensive development downtown (Warner Theatre renovations, UPMC Park, and the multiple Erie Downtown Development Corporation ventures in the vicinity of Perry Square, such as the Flagship City Food Hall) and along the bayfront (Erie-Western Pennsylvania Port Authority-directed clean-up of the bluffs and dock wall improvements along East Dobbins Landing). It should be noted, however, that some are dismayed about PennDOT's plans for the Bayfront Parkway, fearing that its dual-lane roundabouts (at the feet of Holland Street and the Sassafras Street Extension) and a traffic pass-under at State Street will play up its highway-like character and diminish its potential as an asset for cyclists and pedestrians. I'm not sure how actual extraterrestrials get around (sometimes flying bicycles in the movies), but it's something to keep in mind.

- Pepperoni balls finally got the recognition they deserve, with an entire Stanganelli's inventory selling out in a matter of minutes on the home shopping network QVC. If we were to see intergalactic guests in the coming months, we *must* be sure to impress them with this Erie delicacy, as well as the best offerings of our local bars and restaurants who have fought valiantly to keep their lights on in a year hamstrung by restrictions.

Well, this list is not exhaustive, but I think it's a good start. If nothing else, it proves we generally do care for one another and are making strides toward a better and more inclusive future. Yes, we've done some stupid things out of boredom and frustration — such as illegally selling spiked slushies at a North East campground and converting a dried-up Water World at Waldameer into a private skatepark — but hopefully that will subside once our public lives can resume safely.

Once we wise up and do everything we can to make that happen, I feel the outlanders will find our diverse array of dining and entertainment options much to their liking — art, theater (not just the streaming kind, although ours have done a great job with that), live music, pro sports (the SeaWolves are here to stay!), indoor surfing, ax throwing, and even curling. If these activities are too primitive for their potentially overswelled craniums, at least we will have demonstrated initiative.

And that deserves a pat on the back with a warm tentacle.

Matt Swanseger is generally dismissive of conspiracy theories except in those situations when they provide a convenient narrative framing device. He can be reached at mwanseger@eriereader.com



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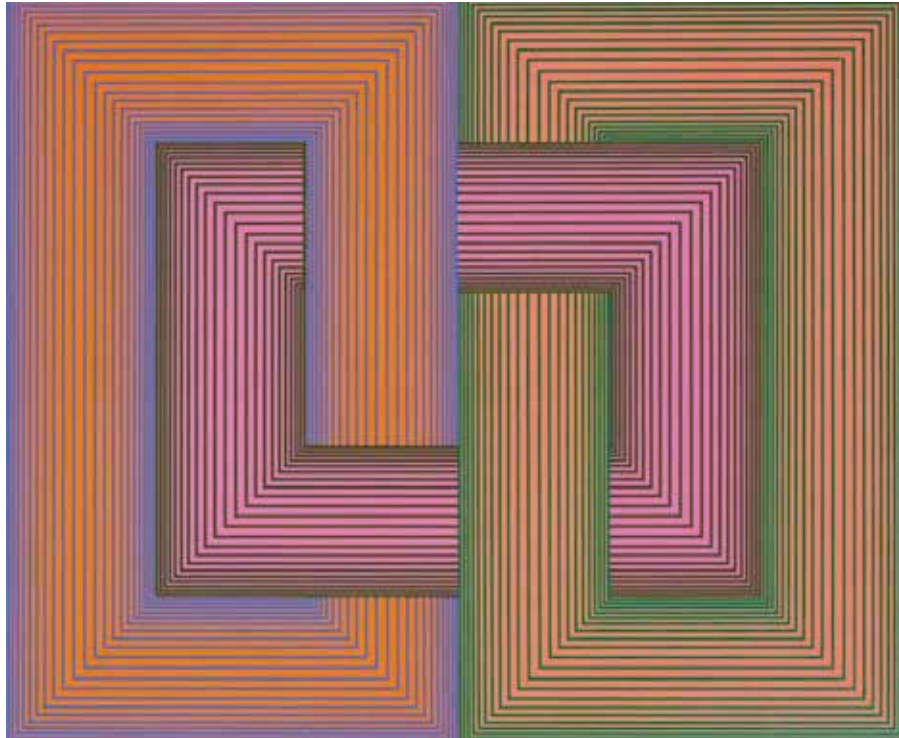
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The Unmistakable Anuszkiewicz

Erie-born Op Art pioneer's work spoke for itself



The 1986 painting "Orange, Rose and Magenta Knot" [left] demonstrates several of Erie-born artist Richard Anuszkiewicz's [bottom right] Senator J. William Fulbright (left) and President Lyndon Baines Johnson view Anuszkiewicz' 1963 "Squaring the Circle," at the White House Arts Festival in 1965.

By: Jonathan Burdick

While recently teaching about the 1950s in my high school U.S. History course, a few students chose to research the art from the decade. Naturally, I recommended that they check out familiar names like Jackson Pollock, Elaine de Kooning, and others who popularized abstract expressionism as their starting point.

"One of these sold for \$140 million?!" one Google-savvy student exclaimed.

"My little brother could do that," another added, thoroughly unimpressed.

"The art world is complicated," I responded matter-of-factly.

I did my best to explain action painting as a technique during which I remembered the Erie born-and-raised Richard Anuszkiewicz. While his optical art (better known as Op Art) was more associated with the '60s and '70s, he established himself and began to refine his innovative ideas during the '50s. I certainly can't claim to be a connoisseur and am not even remotely an art historian, but with my limited knowledge, I decided that my students might find Anuszkiewicz's mathematical approach to art to be an interesting contrast to the controlled chaos of Pollock's canvases.

"Oh wow, he just died in May!" the Google-savvy student said. This surprised me. We found his obituary in the New York Times confirming his death, which

was only a few days shy of his 90th birthday. Local journalist Kevin Cuneo had mentioned his death in his Erie Times-News column the following week, but I had somehow missed it — perhaps too absorbed with the pandemic and looming election.

Anuszkiewicz was born in Erie to Polish immigrants in 1930. It was the early years of the Great Depression and he came early and unexpectedly, forcing his mother, Victoria, to deliver him in their east Erie home. He was his mother's sixth child. She had been widowed with five children before meeting and marrying Richard's father, Adam. Their household was strictly Catholic and they always lived on the brink of poverty, but Anuszkiewicz described his childhood as happy and full of companionship and affection. His father, who worked at the Watson Paper Mill, would bring his young son home scrap tablets of paper to draw on, fueling a love of art early on.

"[Richard] brought out a scrapbook that his mother had kept chronicling his career, which demonstrated the great pride she had in her son's accomplishments," artist and friend Curlee Raven Holton remembered in an essay on their collaboration. "He spoke of the committed support of his family who had no real notion of the world he was entering, but who had great faith in his abilities."

Anuszkiewicz attended St. Stanislaus

Parochial School on East 13th Street for grade school. He was a good and attentive student. According to one account, a nun once noticed his artistic abilities with crayons and assigned him to decorate the classroom blackboard. In 1944, he transferred to Erie Technical High School where he could enroll in more art classes and spent up to three hours a day studying different theories of art under Joseph Plavcan, an established and renowned artist in his own right who taught at the school for four decades and who Anuszkiewicz described as his most significant influence.

Even as a teenager, Anuszkiewicz was a disciplined artist. He won a National Scholastic Art Award as a senior and was awarded a full scholarship to the Cleveland Institute of Art. He then completed his MFA at Yale under the influential German-born artist and teacher Josef Albers, where he worked with oils, watercolors, and ink and, more importantly, began to seriously study color theory. Albers convinced Anuszkiewicz not to pursue Realism and his thesis ultimately focused on the more experimental: an analysis of the creation of space using line drawings.

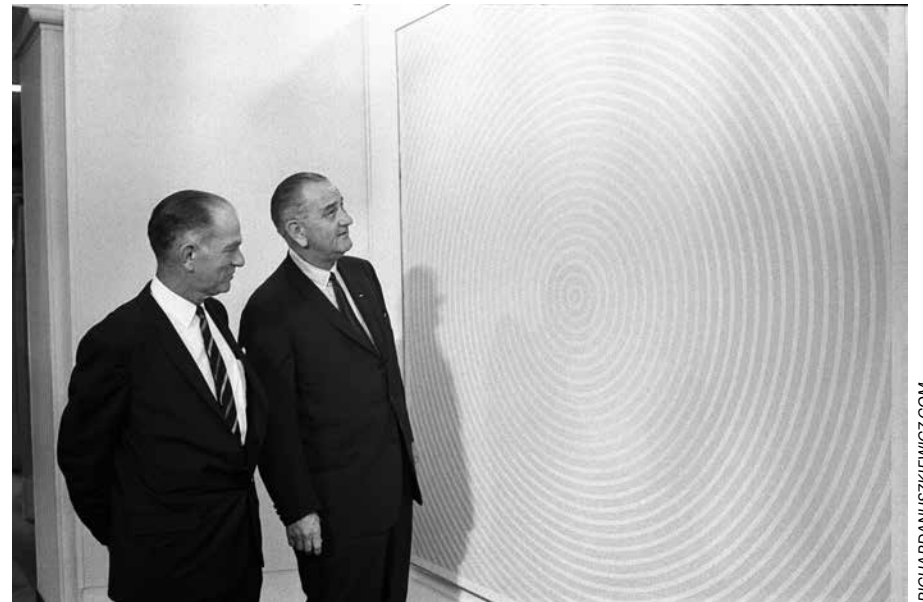
After graduating in 1957, he moved to New York City and secured a job at The

Metropolitan Museum of Art. During this time, he began refining his experimental ideas further, focusing his art on visual tension, high contrast colors, and negative space. His work was continuously rejected by gallery owners. Yet, he was undeterred.

"My work was unique in the sense that there was nothing like it," Anuszkiewicz said in 1980. "But this made it difficult for me. People didn't know what to do with me when I took my work around to the galleries."

In 1960, he married a schoolteacher named Elizabeth Sally Feeney. That same year, he secured his first solo show. Nothing sold for two weeks until on the very last day of the exhibit, influential figures such as Alfred Barr and Nelson Rockefeller purchased pieces. His career took off. His newly-coined Op Art, which explored our perceptions of light, color, and line, was both beloved and reviled. He spent many of these early years fighting the urge to constantly defend his work from those who he felt were misrepresenting his intentions. By 1964 though, *LIFE Magazine* was describing him as "one of the new wizards" of the Op Art movement and he was routinely selling out his one-man shows. Art critic Stuart Preston described him as "the non-objective painter as scientist."

"I'm interested in making something romantic out of a very, very mechanistic geometry," Anuszkiewicz said of his geometrical abstract approach. "Geometry and color represent to me an idealized, classical place that's very clear and very pure."





RICHARDANUSZKIEWICZ.COM

Erie-born artist Richard Anuszkiewicz, shown at work in his studio during the 1960s, was one of the key figures of the Op Art movement. He compared his approach to that of an architect's, playing with perception and exploring what's possible through the rudiments of geometric shapes and lines.

and attention and, despite early adorations, Anuszkiewicz's work was increasingly dismissed.

"What was so hurtful, as far as I was concerned, was that as much as I was given praise and popularity before the [Op Art] movement, once the movement really got on the way, I was attacked — and vehemently so," he reflected. "I felt betrayed by my own critics in this country ... [but] I feel I've explored areas that hadn't been touched by other artists."

As the years passed, appreciation for his work again grew. Youngstown Vindicator art columnist Clyde Singer wrote in 1984 that his art had been "a welcome relief to many because it slowed down the bombardment of abstract expressionism that reigned supreme."

Others, like art critic Marcia Corbino, admired the "tremulous disorientation" of Anuszkiewicz's squares: "It retreats, it advances, it seems to hover over the canvas. ... [It] is so distinctive that his dazzling canvases need no signature."

"To keep from jeopardizing their visual effect, Mr. Anuszkiewicz does not put his signature on his canvases," The New York Times explained. "But he really does not need to. His signature is the canvas itself. An Anuszkiewicz is unmistakable."

That had always been his intent.

"I thought it was an interesting idea to

pit illusion against reality," he said. "The mind tells you that it's a square, but then the eye starts to play tricks. ... An artist always likes to have people think. Art is an intellectual activity. There is always the challenge for the eye and mind."

In the digital age, Op Art may not seem quite as impressive as computer software makes the creation of such art less difficult. As artist Shelley Esaak wrote in 2019 though, "Op Art represents a great deal of math, planning and technical skill, as none of it came freshly-inked out of a computer peripheral. Original, hand-created Op Art deserves respect."

Anuszkiewicz lived his last years in relative solitude with his wife and studio in New Jersey. While his name recognition may have faded somewhat over the years, including in his hometown of Erie, perhaps the most important part of Richard Anuszkiewicz's legacy is his persistence in following his vision and the willingness he had to take risks as he developed his signature style.

"There are no formulas in this profession," he once said. "In order to find your own style, your own direction, you have to go through the process of finding out for yourself."

Indeed, that is what he did throughout his life and it is a lesson worth nurturing and encouraging.

"Art has been a way of life for me," he told the New York Times in 1985. "I have never done anything else. Art was something I needed to say. It made life more than existence."

Jonathan Burdick runs the historical blog Rust & Dirt. He can be reached at jburdick@eriereader.com

He elaborated how his art was about problem-solving and experimenting with visual ideas and contrasts of colors that intrigued him. Creating his art was less about the hand and more about the mind and he desired to create art that was timeless. He viewed what he did similar to that of an architect.

"People thought that I always wanted to shock the eye," he once said. "I didn't want to shock the eye. I wanted to use colors together that had never been used together before."

Instead of mixing colors on a palette, he wanted viewers of his art to mix the colors in their own eyes.

"[I]f you want to change a color you don't have to change that color, you can just change the color around it," he once explained. "[T]he image in my work

has always been determined by what I wanted the color to do. Color function becomes my subject matter and its performance is my painting."

In 1967, he moved out of the city to nearby Englewood, N.J. with Elizabeth and their three children, where he remained the rest of his life (although with many trips back to Erie). As his fame grew though, he continued to stay grounded.

"Unlike most artists I know, he is neither a limelight hog nor a bore, but a very straight, very likable fellow," writer Jay Jacobs said of Anuszkiewicz.

Critical views of his art fluctuated over the years, but he continued to push the envelope on the ideas that interested him. Abstract expressionism and pop art received much of the critical praise

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The Top 5 Films in a Very Bizarre Movie Year

How we consumed film may have changed forever



What do our "Top 5 Movies of 2020" have in common? For one, all five classify as smaller, mid-budget films. Secondly, none of them received wide-scale release in U.S. movie theaters, instead distributed through various streaming channels to be enjoyed at home.

3. I'm Thinking of Ending Things

Now for another story about the inevitability of death. Charlie Kaufman adapts Iain Reid's novel into a story of loneliness and regret that is uniquely Kaufman's style. As the film progresses, the story of a man taking his girlfriend to meet his parents slowly gives way to a dreamlike and occasionally horrifying descent into the mind, and a look at a life filled with pain, grief, and unimaginable longing. With the possible exception of *Synecdoche, New York*, this film may be Kaufman's most existentially terrifying. The film itself is difficult to explain without giving much away, so if this style of filmmaking is for you, just see it for yourself.

134 minutes // Rated R // Netflix

4. Never Rarely Sometimes Always

Yet another film that ended up being far more relevant to the times in which we are living than probably initially thought. Eliza Hittman's story of a pregnant teenager's journey to New York City to have an abortion is a drama that plays out thousands of times every day in the real world. As a result, Hittman shoots her film in a stark, realist style that presents this girl's plight as just one in a series of situations that arise whenever the issue of abortion becomes such a political hot-button. These issues have come to the forefront again for obvious reasons and because of that, films like this are a vitally important reminder that the greatest (and most endangered) freedom of all is the right to bodily autonomy.

101 minutes // Rated PG-13 // Focus Features

5. Bacurau

Finally, Kleber Mendonca Filho and Juliano Dornelles' brilliant little genre exercise takes what starts as a social issues drama and injects it with a shot of action movie energy that makes it a rival to the best of John Carpenter. Following the townspeople in a small, off-the-map Brazilian town who soon have to defend themselves against outside invaders, this little film was the most pleasant surprise of the year. Mixing social satire with exploitation movie energy, you never really expect which direction the film is going to go until it's already taken you there. The perfect response to anyone who claims that all foreign language films are boring.

113 minutes // Vitrine Filmes/SBS Distribution

Honorable Mentions

The Assistant
Mank
The Vast of Night
Zombi Child
Save Yourselves!

By: Forest Taylor

The year 2020 has fundamentally changed the world in ways that we can't fully comprehend yet, and the movie industry was no different. With the ongoing pandemic keeping movie theaters closed for much of the year, almost all major releases were canceled for the entirety of 2020. With theaters closed, streaming channels quickly filled in the gap, but even there, big studio films were having difficulty finding an audience. Now as streaming becomes more prominent and multi-billion dollar corporations tighten their stranglehold on when and how we can experience media, some have serious fears that movie theaters as a whole may not survive this pandemic. Like it was for almost everything else, 2020 was brutal on the world of film.

However, there is a bright side in all of this. Being the first year in a long time with no Star Wars, Marvel, or live-action remakes of Disney cartoons monopolizing most of the discussion, things are now more open for smaller, mid-budget films. Some of them are still too hard to find, but 2020 has given us a few unexpected gems from unlikely places. Films that might otherwise get lost in the shuffle are being championed by critics and audiences in this "year without movies." At the very least, maybe producers will start to think twice before spending \$300 million on a film.

Most refreshingly, this has been an exemplary year for female filmmakers, as a sizable chunk of the most acclaimed films of the year have been directed by women.

With that said, here are the Top 5 films to be released in a year when movies were mostly floating in limbo. No one really knows what the future of movie-going will look like, but great films will always be here.

1. First Cow

Kelly Reichardt once again sets a film in the untamed American frontier to tell a tale about the simple people that history often forgets, and continues to cement herself as one of the best American filmmakers working today. The story about two men who start their own business with a little help from a wealthy landowner's milk cow is simple enough, but Reichardt uses that to showcase the capitalist exploitation of the Wild West as well as the opportunities that it can offer to people who might otherwise be denied them. At its heart though, it is a tale of friendship. John Magaro and Orion Lee have a chemistry that carries the entire movie, and Reichardt's simple but effective direction makes this the easy pick for the best film of the year.

121 minutes // Rated PG-13 // A24

2. She Dies Tomorrow

Amy Seimetz attempted to make a modern horror film based on her own nightmares but inadvertently made something far more relevant. In her own way, she made possibly the most accurate snapshot of the fear and anxiety of life in the year 2020. The story of a woman's knowledge of her own death becoming contagious until it spreads to her entire neighborhood is ripe for interpretation, but the images of people slowly overwhelmed with dread as they await the inevitable will always be tied to this moment in time. Seimetz's take on the fear of death is equal parts scary, surreal, and strangely funny — and the result is a modern horror masterpiece.

84 minutes // Rated R // Neon



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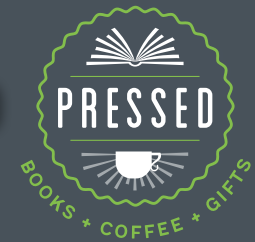


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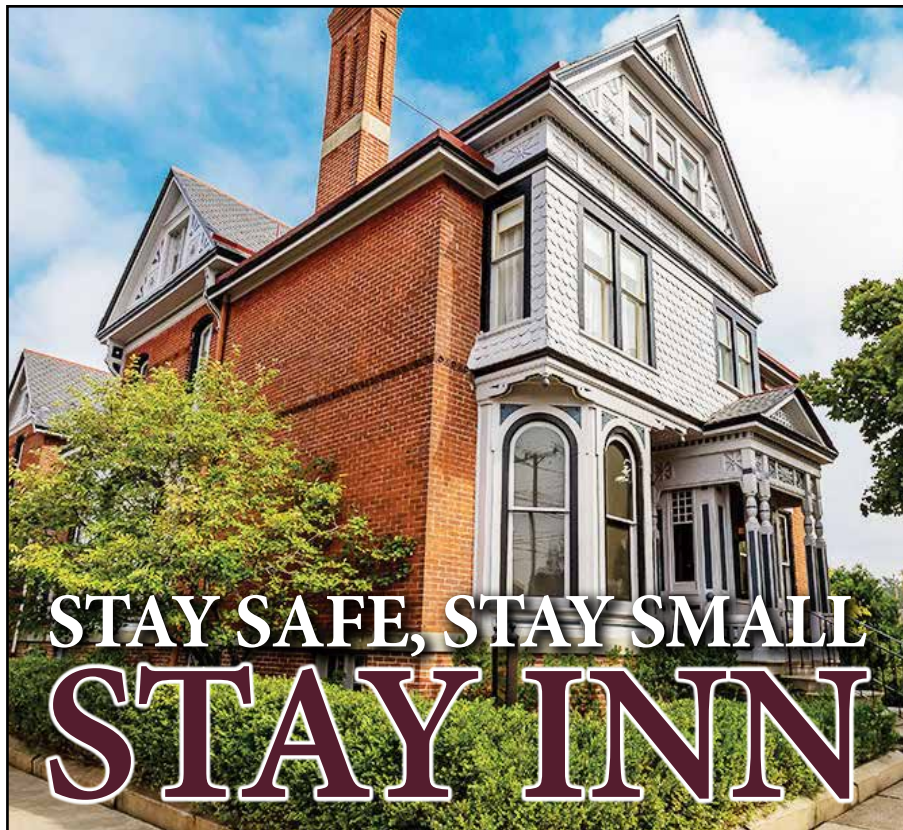
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Top TV Picks of 2020

Some of our favorite small screen offerings this year



NICK WARREN

By: Nick Warren

Television meant a lot to us this year. We rallied around absurdities like *Tiger King* as Netflix settled in as one of the medium's predominant platforms. New streaming services like Disney+, HBO Max, and The Peacock came onto the scene, to varying success. This year saw the end of beloved shows like *The Good Place*, *Silicon Valley*, and *Bojack Horseman*. There were surprisingly fantastic comedies from FXX like *Dave* and the second seasons of *What We Do in the Shadows* and Hulu's unparalleled *PEN15*. Technology ran rampant in shows like *Upload* and *Devs*, superpowered teams wrought havoc in brilliant sophomore seasons of *The Umbrella Academy* and *The Boys*, and animation gave us everything from the mind-bending psychedelia of *The Midnight Gospel* to an honest-to-goodness *Animaniacs* reboot. Things like *Lovecraft Country* and *The Good Lord Bird* examined race through a stylized historical context, while shows like *P-Valley* and *I May Destroy You* gave a new generation of creators a powerful voice. As winter sets in, it's certainly the time to take a crack at some of this year's best shows. Here are a few more of my favorites this year.

**The Queen's Gambit // Miniseries // Netflix
Best Limited Series / Best Overall**

An achievement in modern prestige television, the biggest problem of *The*

Queen's Gambit is that there isn't more of it to watch. This in reality, of course, is a good thing. Some miniseries need to be a miniseries, and this is one of them. Based on the 1983 novel by Walter Tevis, the seven-episode series follows the fictional Beth Harmon (Anya Taylor-Joy) from her childhood in an orphanage to being a world-traveling chess champion. An unlikely prodigy, Harmon struggles with addiction (to an unnamed tranquilizer) and alcoholism, attempting to balance her life with her unrelenting chess obsession. In short, it's visually stunning, emotionally engaging, and meticulously well-crafted — complete with accurate gameplay, even according to expert chess players. It's just what you picture "good TV" as being these days, just inventive enough to be impressive, while still being thoroughly watchable and rewarding. It has even started a revival of chess in popular culture, particularly for female players.

Created by: Scott Frank and Allan Scott / Seven episodes

**Schitt's Creek // Season Six // CBC/
Pop TV
Best Comedy / Best Final Season /
Best-deserved Emmy Sweep**

If you haven't started watching *Schitt's Creek* already, breathe easy bébé, because you're in for a treat. While things get off to an odd start (power through those first three episodes or so, trust me), it's easily one of the most lovable shows ever made. The Academy agreed,

Streaming television brought us some unforgettable characters in 2020, including baby-sitters, bounty hunters, chess wunderkinds, comedienne, and, of course, the inimitable David Rose (center)

and in 2020 it won *nine* Emmy Awards, sweeping the acting categories. Though Season Six might not be its best (I would argue for Season Five), it deserved the attention. Created by the father-and-son team of Eugene and Daniel Levy, it follows the Rose family after losing their fortune, as they take up residence in an adjoining pair of motel rooms. As one would expect from actors Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, and Chris Elliott, it's hilarious. What the junior Levy, Annie Murphy, and the rest of the cast add, however, is what makes this show rise above its expectations. The heart in *Schitt's Creek* is nearly unparalleled in any other series in recent memory, and I would have never imagined crying as much as I did while watching the entire run.

Created by: Eugene Levy and Dan Levy / 14 episodes (80 total)

**The Baby-Sitters Club // Season One // Netflix
Best Family-friendly Show/Best Ray of
Pure Joy**

In an example of a show that is both entirely better than it needs to be and something that is perfect for exactly what it sets out to be, I give you: *The Baby-Sitters Club*. Though I don't have any children myself, this show feels like something that could be equally loved by children and parents alike. It's shockingly good, almost to a humorous degree. The amount of sincerity balanced with honest-to-goodness sweetness is a hard routine to pull off. The show is able to deftly dive into issues like racial and gender identity while never once feeling heavy-handed. Based on the Scholastic series of books by Ann M. Martin, the show features Kristy, Claudia, Stacey, and Mary Anne as they form the club, with each character well-defined and unique unto themselves.

Created by: Rachel Shukert // 10 episodes

**The Mandalorian // Season Two // Disney+
Best Action/Best Star Wars Media
Since Empire**

While Season One of Disney's *The Mandalorian* was excellent, Season

Two managed to outdo it. Perhaps the key reason for Season Two's success is that of simple character development. The first eight episodes got us where we wanted to be: Seeing Din Djarin, the title character, acting as real adoptive father to Grogu, better known to the world as "Baby Yoda." The cutest being in the galaxy far, far away is just as adorable and gif-able as he was before, but now we see the show with raised stakes, as the Mandalorian truly loves the green little guy. How a character with no facial expressions is able to come off as a positive father figure is telling, but this on-screen relationship is complemented with some standout episodes like "The Jedi" — written and directed by Edinboro University's own Dave Filoni. The *Mandalorian* is arguably one of the best pieces of Star Wars media ever made, and reason enough to give Disney + a try.

Created by: Jon Favreau, based on Star Wars by George Lucas / Eight episodes (16 total)

**Feel Good // Season One // BBC/Netflix
Best Import/Best Show You Probably
Haven't Seen**

Fast, frantic, and heartwarming, *Feel Good* explores the many complicated ways its characters choose to chase happiness. The series centers around comedian Mae Martin, playing a fictionalized version of herself. One night after performing at a comedy club, she meets a woman, George (Charlotte Ritchie), and the two quickly fall in love. The series sees Martin grappling with her recovery as a cocaine addict and her as-yet undiagnosed mental health issues. Martin is an intensely lovable figure, her performance filled with charm and brimming with neurosis to match. As George struggles with her own queer identity, the couple navigates these issues and more. With guest stars like Lisa Kudrow and Phil Burgers (aka Dr. Brown), the couples' world is wonderfully fleshed out, creating a quietly triumphant work, one that's thankfully been green-lit for its second and final season.

Created by: Mae Martin and Joe Hampson / Six episodes

Nick Warren wasn't able to watch every series in 2020, but all of the above mentioned are some of his favorites.

Our Top Albums of 2020

Music that provided relief when it was sorely needed



This year offered an outstanding array of musical releases, with some helping us escape the harshness of reality and others boldly confronting it.

By: Aaron Mook and Nick Warren

It seems like each December, we arrive at the end of the year in awe of everything that's led us here. Of course, it's no secret that this year has been particularly grueling for a number of reasons (one in particular), but all of that time inside with this music only makes the songs and albums that stuck with us even stronger. Consisting not only of the music that felt important and timely but of the records we simply couldn't put down, we invite our readers to join us in celebrating and hopefully discovering some of the best albums 2020 had to offer.

1. Empty Country // Empty Country

In 2019, we lost David Berman. This may seem unrelated to *Empty Country*, the first album from Cymbals Eat Guitars frontman Joseph D'Agostino under the same pseudonym, but in a revealing interview from this year, the singer-songwriter mentioned that he and Berman were close — so close, in fact, that Berman was one of the first people to give D'Agostino feedback on the project. The two were even slated to tour together until Berman's passing due to treatment-resistant depression, an event that impacted D'Agostino deeply.

Berman would be proud of what Empty Country has become, as D'Agostino carries a similar penchant for descriptive storytelling, often blunt but always filled with distinct verbiage. His choice to distance himself from the synth-

stained fuzz of CEG in favor of an organic Americana vibe only helps accentuate his characters. Take "Marian," which tells not only the story of D'Agostino's grandmother's death by a drunk driver in 1983 but also a clairvoyant who foresees their own death in 1967. In "Becca," the song's titular character painstakingly crafts and hands out faulty eclipse glasses. It's hard to say why the most captivating songwriting is often the darkest, but as a prisoner pines on closing track "SWIM," "We're evil, baby/ Sorry, I guess some people have to be." — AM

2. Charli XCX // How I'm Feeling Now

On its surface, *How I'm Feeling Now* is one of the best modern pop albums of the last decade. The latest work of Charlotte Emma Aitchison — better known as Charli XCX — is easily her strongest record to date, which is an impressive feat unto itself, coming just eight months after 2019's much-lauded *Charli*. The genesis of this work gives it even more relevance and import as it was made in collaboration with her fans over a six-week period during the pandemic lockdown. Released on May 15, Aitchison used only tools at her immediate disposal to craft everything from the artwork to the tracklisting, utilizing feedback from her fans. What she made was something bursting with pop hooks and moving synthesizer work, her vocals at times used as soft delays and powerful vocoded choruses. You'll be hard-pressed to find more earworms

in a single effort, its catchiness only rivaled by its creativity. Perhaps the single greatest example of a "quarantine album," it transcends its context to become a nearly perfect release altogether. — NW

3. The Front Bottoms // In Sickness and In Flames

These days, no one does what Front Bottoms frontman Brian Sella does nearly as well. The verbose, unrelenting lyrics he is known for are back at peak form on this, the band's seventh full-length album. While his contemporaries like the Mountain Goats and AJJ release relatively forgettable efforts, Sella returns to what made things like *Talon of the Hawk* so brilliant. Happily learning every word to this release, listeners will relish singing along to them with heartfelt clarity (which prompted me to revisit the band's full catalog with gusto). Aging punks and younger millennials will find solace in Sella's manic delivery and unforgettable tracks. — NW

4. Phoebe Bridgers // Punisher

For many, Phoebe Bridgers' *Punisher* will be the album that defines 2020, and it's not difficult to hear why. The 26-year-old singer-songwriter's second affair is gloomy and cinematic, making the small stuff (night walks, recurring dreams, and getting stoned in your bedroom) seem just as dramatic as, well, the apocalypse itself. And the apocalypse does in fact seem to get its own moment on the record, on closing track and song of the year contender "I Know the End."

"Over the coast, everyone's convinced/It's a government drone or an alien spaceship/Either way, we're not alone," she sings against a grandiose string and horn section that would make Sufjan Stevens blush. — AM

5. Perfume Genius // Set My Heart On Fire Immediately

Beautifully heavy and emotionally heart-wrenching, *Set My Heart On Fire Immediately* is a triumph of an album — perhaps the best yet from Michael Alden Hadreas, the Iowa-born musician and current Seattle resident. Following

watershed albums like 2014's *Too Bright* and 2017's *No Shape*, this record is also Hadreas' heaviest yet, with its fuzzy and echoing tones providing a captivating backdrop to his deservedly acclaimed lyricism. With cuts harkening back to '80s shoegaze and avant-garde baroque pop alike, Hadreas has carved out a timeless classic in its 50-minute running time — one that goes by like nothing, marked by moments of gorgeous subtlety and epic grandeur. — NW

6. Run the Jewels // RTJ4

If *Fetch the Bolt Cutters* was the soundtrack to April, *RTJ4* was the soundtrack to June. Released during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests, this album coalesced feelings of righteous anger and politically motivated activism for countless listeners. Producer El-P and emcee Killer Mike dropped their fourth studio album at just the right time, and it left an indelible impression on its listeners. The duo's impeccable output was further heightened thanks to this nearly-perfect offering. This 11-track record featured guests like Zack De La Rocha, 2 Chainz, and Mavis Staples in fiery cuts of passion that just begged to be blasted from your speakers. — NW

7. Slow Pulp // Moveys

Making a bid for the year's most understated album, Slow Pulp operates much like tourmate Alex G. Immediacy may not be one of their strong suits, but crafting a mood that sets the stage for their listeners is. *Moveys*, the debut album from the Wisconsin-based indie-rockers, feels light and heavy all at once, detailing the simple day to day struggle of staying optimistic and upholding relationships against airy acoustic arrangements that feel specifically designed to soundtrack a fall spent indoors. Similar to Phoebe Bridgers, Slow Pulp excel at creating a rewarding listen with hooks sturdy enough to last. — AM

8. Hum // Inlet

Some artists are lauded for their commitment to change — it's thrilling, for example, to hear Radiohead reinvent themselves every five years — but Hum is not one of those artists. And just like their alternative metal peers in Def-

NICK WARREN

tones, Hum released an album this year that doubled down on precisely everything they do best. This wasn't just any album either, but the first since their 1998 opus, *Downward is Heavenward*. *Inlet* is full of unrelenting riffs (opening track "Waves") and '90s throwbacks ("Step Into You") — at least until its gorgeous closing tracks, "Folding" and "Shapeshifter." — AM

9. Soccer Mommy // color theory

Released in 2018, *Clean*, the debut from singer-songwriter Sophie Allison under the name Soccer Mommy, was widely praised for its youthful energy and personal storytelling. This year, Soccer Mommy released a follow-up, the aptly titled *color theory*, which finds the band taking on a much lush-er and more mature sonic palette that leaves them sounding like, well, a full

band. Inspired by the timelessness of pop-rockers like Natalie Imbruglia and Avril Lavigne, *color theory* quickly gets to its lead single ("circle the drain") and never ceases to let up, combining Allison's distinct writing with a newfound penchant for synthesizers and textured guitar riffs ("yellow is the color of her eyes"). — AM

10. Fiona Apple // Fetch the Bolt Cutters

According to most best-of-the-year lists, this album belongs at the top of the list, and not the bottom (correction: It's the bottom of the top). Much has been said about Fiona Apple's album, her fifth studio in 24 years. *Fetch the Bolt Cutters* deserves just about every bit of praise that it has received. It was released in mid-April at the absolutely perfect time, when the anxiety of self-quarantine was

weighing on everyone. Apple's use of unconventional instrumentation is done magnificently, as she is able to craft a one-of-a-kind masterpiece dealing with some extremely difficult subjects. It's undeniably one of the best albums made in any year, and will likely be known as the defining musical work associated with the pandemic. — NW

Aaron Mook's honorable mentions:
King Krule - *Man Alive!*, Porches - *Ricky Music*, Mansions - *Big Bad*, Oneohtrix Point Never - *Magic Oneohtrix Point Never*, Deftones - *Ohms*

Nick Warren's honorable mentions:
Trace Mountains - *Lost in the Country*, Sault - *Black Is*, Rose City Band - *Summerlong*, Tom Misch & Yussef Dayes - *What Kinda Music*, Andy Shauf - *The Neon Skyline*

Erie's Best Local Albums of 2020

Three full-length records from local artists

By: Nick Warren

Bill\$up - *Manifest*



From the first beautiful warbly notes of *Manifest's* opening track, you know you're in for something special. An extremely talented producer and engineer, Chauncy Bill\$up is an Erie native and Cathedral Prep graduate, returning to Erie after a stint in Manhattan. After breaking his ankle playing semi-pro football in 2014, he started experimenting with audio programs and making his own hip-hop beats. Needless to say, he's come a long way. Bill\$up released *Manifest* in February of 2020 following January's *Spaceship EP* with Kenny Ba\$e (who collaborated with Bill\$up on "Never Gon Stop") in January. Joined by local artists like Dommy, Aaron Rennel, K-Sanz, and more, Bill\$up built *Manifest* based on the seven hermetic principles, functioning on a deeper lev-

el, one that succeeds via ambition and surface-level appeal alike.

Human Animal - *False Realities*



You either remember the glory of Erie's hardcore scene, or you don't. *False Realities* will work for both types of people. Made up of some of Erie's most esteemed and experienced musicians, Human Animal simultaneously pens a love letter to the genre and a promise-of-intent for the future, in a powerful thrill ride of an album from start to finish. Coming in at 10 tracks in just under a half an hour, the album flies by, perfectly paced and portioned. Beginning with the riffs-to-breakdown blitz of "Perfect Person," you're treated to grooves like "The Outlier, Pt. 2," the gang vocal whoas of "Bastards of the North," and the epic album closer "F.E.A.R."

This American Song - *People of the Stars*



A perfect encapsulation of what makes *This American Song* unique, *People of the Stars* is a pleasure to listen to in all of its wonderful eccentricities. This is a brass-infused rock band raised on pure punk ethos. In tracks like "Easy Way Out," each song builds with a drunken swagger leading to an almost religious cacophony. It's organized madness, and it's catchy as heck. Featuring a slew of local music scene veterans, the dozen-song album is pieced together with expertise and impressive production. Guitarist John Johnston's hazy effect layers team up with Jeff Phillips's impassioned delivery. It's a friendly listen, and one you won't want to put down.

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Artists Adapt Through Pandemic

Local talents reveal how they stayed strong and stayed creative



By: Charles Brown

It goes without saying that 2020 hasn't been short on surprises, with COVID-19's rude awakening looming largest. With various shutdowns throughout the country issued by governors all over, businesses large and small have struggled to maintain their presence, and the people of America have been in disarray with quarantines, job losses, curfews, and other restrictions to control the spread of the virus. In the entertainment world, local artists who were actively playing venues and taverns had to reckon with a standstill due to the pandemic. The Erie music scene and its fans weren't quite prepared for such a crisis, and with live shows virtually eliminated, we're left with the question "What now?"

As 2021 approaches, fear and confusion have transformed into adaptation and adjustment for artists of all genres. Former Dirty Pickles frontman **Matty B** has made

Erie MC Charles "CEE" Brown spoke with several musical artists from around the community to discuss the various ways the pandemic both hampered and nurtured their endeavors.

the stage his home base over the years, commanding audiences with an irresistible energy. Though the coronavirus had put a halt to his show bookings, the charismatic singer used his voice in another light.

"I wasn't a huge fan of playing on live streams because I just couldn't feel the same energy," **Matty B** admits. "So I came up with the idea of putting my personality to use by doing a live radio show (Distraction Radio Shuffle) featuring all of my friends and fellow local artists."

The digital world has been a benefit for many creatives including DJ and producer **DJ Salt**, who sees the break in his business as both a gift and a curse. "My business as being an entertainer was taken away with the snap of a finger," the beatmaker expresses. "In the meantime, it was a blessing to get society ready for the next level of the digital world. Thank God I've had Beatstars (a music-selling platform) and was able to still make a living on selling my production on my website and also have people come over to record."

Electronica instrumentalist **Adam Holquist** has also turned to the cyber world to keep things in rotation, collaborating with the Fazed Cookies man himself, **Michael Bennet**, for their Social Distancing Variety Hour special. Holquist says, "It started off pretty lighthearted and music-based, and then as living out in the world has gotten more serious, the show has too." Touching base with politicians, community leaders, and more, the duo has covered various topics to provoke thought and change.

Bassist **Ralph Reitinger III**, who is known for shredding with acts such as Eric Brewer and Jeff Fetterman, has been looking at the bright side of things while forging onward. "I mean what's crazy really is that the pandemic actually has helped me. I've been staying busy with gigs

as much as you can during this whole situation."

Major Coins artist **Aaron Rennel** has been using the pandemic as an opportunity to grow as a musician. Rennel states, "I've just been doing a lot of self-work which helped to keep me in a space of productivity and growth throughout the pandemic." Another hip hop heavy hitter, **Doc' Proto**, states "I think this is a good time for artists to challenge their resourcefulness, and to find a way to enhance our creativity."

Optimism has settled in with the music community over the course of these trying times. Acoustic looper and songwriter **Justin Moyer** had seen his career reach new heights with touring, but with the virus hampering that momentum, the vocalist has been using the state of the world to challenge his lyricism for a new project. "I struggled writing things that had meaning to everyone at the time," Moyer confesses. "COVID changed that, and new songs like '95 Mask,' 'If I Were You,' and 'It's Only Paper' emerged."

Crown Boyz emcee **Jyn 17** decided to stay true to his goals to further his journey. The rapper advises others to "remain humble. Take every day and every move you make seriously. Especially because of this pandemic, stay clean to keep the germs away. Write your goals down and check them off."

It's quite clear that many of us were caught off guard by this year and left questioning what our next move might be musically. But as in any situation where we are tested, we lean on grit and resolve to maneuver around and conquer the challenges. Kudos to our Erie musicians for pushing through and adjusting to provide us fans with their sound, voices, and showmanship that we all miss seeing up close and personal.



As the old saying goes, "The show must go on." And regardless of the current events that have been sweeping the world by storm, our artists here will not let the curtains close just yet.


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Our Podcast Picks of the Year

Five of our writers highlight their defining audio offering for 2020



The rise of podcasts as a medium has only gained momentum this year. Familiar voices gave us comfort, as we continued to binge on endless hours of audio delights while we stayed home and collectively got through the year together. Here are some of the feeds that helped us weather it the best.

Blocked Party patreon.com/blockedparty

Between the pandemic and the most tumultuous election in recent memory, 2020 was a year to be online — or not, depending on your threshold for mental punishment. Regardless of which camp you fall into, *Blocked Party* is here to recap each week in Internet news (and specifically, Twitter drama) so you don't have to experience it firsthand.

Hosted by Vancouver comedian John Cullen and leftist Twitter personality Stefan Heck, the podcast bases each episode upon their guest's story of being blocked by someone — whether they happen to be famous or an ex's dad — and revels in the silliest hurt feelings produced on the world's most mindless app. Fortunately, for those who couldn't care less about Twitter, the show never stays in one place too long; random top

three lists, hot takes, and the best of the worst of the Cameo app keep this podcast moving along at a light-speed pace. The show also gets bonus points for continually producing some of the absolute best live shows via Zoom for fans during quarantine and raising money for great causes in the process. — Aaron Mook

Morbid **Morbid Network**

Nothing takes the mind off a global pandemic, presidential election, and all the other horrors 2020 has thrown our way quite like *Morbid: A True Crime Podcast*. With tales of the most prolific killers, hosts Alaina Urquhart (an autopsy technician) and Ashleigh Kelley (a hairstylist) break down the details of these cases and the psychology that vanquishes any fragment of humanity from these killers.

Similar to shows like *Dateline* or *Criminal Minds* (but not fictional), *Morbid* breaks down the stories scene by scene, giving details like how 19-year-old victim Jessica Chambers was burned so badly that the first responders threw up while testifying at trial, and how John Wayne Gacy took the clothes off of his victims

and donated them to The Salvation Army so other people would wear them.

Blood and gore aside, Ash and Alaina discuss how horrendous these crimes are, bringing an ounce of justice to the victims. Through thoughtful, in-depth research, *Morbid* raises awareness about the victims, while providing off-beat humor to offset the absolutely macabre nature of the murder stories that might easily wrap listeners in a cocoon of paranoia otherwise. It goes without saying that this podcast isn't light listening material that you turn on when cooking dinner or doing your hundredth self-care coloring book for the week, but if you're looking to escape your own reality for a couple of hours each week, *Morbid* is the most memorable and intriguing form of entertainment you could ask for. — Chloe Forbes

The Lowe Post **ESPN**

Guiding hoops heads through quite possibly the strangest time in basketball history (between the Orlando "bubble," the 8-week chaotic offseason, and the now-standard superstar movement), writer Zach Lowe offers up his brand of eager wisdom and well-curated guest

spots. On the subject of the latter, most notable is Lowe's devotion to basketball writers, both at his ESPN home and beyond. He's obviously interested in the finished article, but more importantly, he's not afraid to dig into the unglamorous "nuts and bolts" of journalism during these talks.

Meanwhile, his recurring mentions of the Toronto fanbase's "Fox Mulder" disposition, the "What Up Beck" intro for frequent guest Howard Beck, and the light ribbing he gets from Rachel Nichols keeps the program from getting too academic. Other highlights include his informal polling of front offices, along with his willingness to stop talking about overanalyzed teams (at some point last year, he just couldn't stomach Philadelphia 76ers discussions).

Always look out for episodes featuring the Kevins (Arnovitz or Pelton), Chris Herring, Twitter's favorite sideline commentator Doris Burke, and Bill Simmons. If you're looking for Simmons' fastball, it's here that the two recapture some Grantland magic.

The 2020-21 season starts shortly; he's the best basketball mind you could follow. — Christopher Lantinen

My Favorite Murder **Exactly Right Media**

In the past decade, "true crime" as a genre in media has become staggeringly mainstream. With more shows, movies, and podcasts gaining popularity by the day, it is no surprise that one of the best podcasts of the year centers on the subject. A once taboo topic, it is now difficult to go about your day without seeing true crime in some form or another in popular media. Launched in early 2016, *My Favorite Murder* is the perfect example of society's obsession with the unspeakable: 34 million monthly listeners of the podcast prove that it isn't a niche venture.

At a Halloween party in 2015, comedian Karen Kilgariff met and befriended television host Georgia Hardstark, and the rest, as they say, is history. Bonding over their mutual interest in the unset-

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ting and disturbing reasons people are motivated to commit murders, the two decided they would begin weekly discussions of their “favorite murder.” What began as two new friends chatting about the murders that most interested them has grown tenfold in the years since its inception. Branching out to other forms of true crime — attempted murders, survivor stories, and missing persons — Kilgariff and Hardstark have created a media empire.

Each story is bookended by social commentary and a few laughs here and there — mostly at their own expense — making for a seemingly irreverent combination; a disclaimer set forth by the hosts in many episodes and live shows states that they are not making fun of the crimes but instead utilizing comedy to balance the bad with some good.

With hilarious Hollywood stories and honesty about mental health and social issues, Kilgariff and Hardstark rarely shy away from uncomfortable or embarrassing situations, instead addressing them head-on. Ending episodes with small moments of celebration from their weeks and fan-submitted hometown stories — which began as hometown murders and has now branched into anything from ghost stories to tales of Bigfoot — this podcast has a little something for every true crime enthusiast. — Ally Kutz

Dear Hank and John Complexly and WNYC Studios

Between brothers Hank and John Green, no side of the Internet has been left untouched. Together and individually these content creators have written, hosted, and produced young adult

novels (like John’s recent *Turtles All the Way Down* and the landmark *The Fault In Our Stars* and Hank’s most recent *A Beautifully Foolish Endeavor*), YouTube channels (Vlogbrothers, Crash Course, SciShow), VidCon, Project for Awesome, studio albums — the list goes on.

So, it came as no surprise to their online community, Nerdfighteria, when the Green brothers launched a weekly advice podcast, *Dear Hank and John*. True to its tagline “a comedy podcast about death,” the two 40-somethings offer “dubious” and humorous advice to questions sent in by listeners. Since its 2015 inception, the podcast has expanded to more than basic life-advice. Today, John and Hank answer a wide array of questions, big and small (Could Elsa solve climate change? How do you unfriend someone IRL?), with thought-

ful analysis, personal experience, and, of course, joking wisecracks.

Endearingly sincere, the brotherhood of John and Hank finds a compelling balance between John’s realistic cynicism and Hank’s unwavering optimism as they attempt to help their audience navigate life in the 21st century. Simple in format, the podcast typically runs 40 minutes long before ending with the latest news from each brother’s passion, the planet Mars (Hank) and the English football club AFC Wimbledon (John).

After 5 years of recording, the podcast remains a reliable, tried-and-true listen. There seems to be no shortage of queries for the Green brothers as they contemplate what Danish people call Danish pastries and if the North Pole is a continent or island. — Hannah Wyman

Top 5 Books of 2020

No shortage of escapes in a year stuck at home



By: Ally Kutz

The year 2020 has been...interesting, to say the least. With a pandemic bringing our lives to a complete halt followed by a new normal of masks, social distancing, and self-quarantining, many were left feeling stuck while staying at home. Luckily, 2020 also brought with it an astounding number of great books to help pass the time in isolation and escape to new worlds. Some of the best took us to the Deep South and Los Angeles; to a small mountain mining town in 1950s Mexico; to a remote island off the coast of Ireland; to the mysterious world between living and dying; and into the author’s very mind

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett Fiction, Historical Fiction // Riverhead Books

Following the success of 2016’s *The Mothers*, Brit Bennett’s newest release is one of the most talked-about — and celebrated — books of 2020. Set in the fictional small Southern Black community of Mallard, Louisiana, *The Vanishing Half* centers on twin sisters Desiree and Stella Vignes, who run away at 16 to pursue a new life. Struck by hardships relating to racial identity, the twins choose different paths. Desiree continues to live as a light-skinned Black woman, while Stella secretly passes for white. Although they become physically separated from each other, their lives

remain intertwined.

Spanning the 1950s to the 1990s, the timeline woven by Bennett is beautifully written and thought-provoking. Bennett takes readers through various “episodes” in the twins’ history, throwing the reader into the throes of late 1960s racial tensions and how one decision can so drastically affect so many lives. With *The Vanishing Half*, Bennett adds a spectacular piece to the understanding of the inner turmoil of racial identity in mid-20th century America.

Mexican Gothic by Silvia Moreno-Garcia Horror, Historical Fiction // Del Rey

Inspired by classics like *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, Silvia Moreno-Garcia’s new horror novel, *Mexican Gothic*, was a triumph in the book world this year. The novel takes place in 1950s Mexico and follows 22-year-old Noemí as she goes to investigate a mysterious letter she received from her newly married cousin Catalina. In this letter, Catalina claims to be seeing ghosts and believes that her new husband and his family are poisoning her. Noemí finds herself at High Place, the mansion of the once-wealthy Doyle family into which her cousin has married, and what follows is a horror masterpiece that will make any reader’s skin crawl.

Moreno-Garcia puts so much emotion and passion into Noemí that it is difficult not to get swept up in this Gothic horror. With beautifully written

prose and excellent character development, there’s no guessing as to why *Mexican Gothic* was so widely admired this year and is being adapted into a Hulu series.

The Guest List by Lucy Foley Mystery, Thriller // William Morrow

Set on a remote island off the coast of Ireland, Lucy Foley weaves an intricate web of mysteries in her newest thriller, *The Guest List*. While everything on the surface is perfect and polished, what lies beneath each character’s façade is something more sinister and ugly. Events leading up to the wedding of a rising television star and a magazine publisher don’t go exactly as planned, and the past refuses to stay away from their perfect day. From an old drinking game gone horribly wrong to a purposely ruined bridesmaid’s dress, each guest is keeping his or her own secrets that don’t stay secret for long. Told from alternating perspectives of the bride, the plus-one, the best man, the wedding planner, and the bridesmaid, this thriller is sure to suck you right in and leave you hanging until the very end.

With sharp contrasts between the days and the nights, Foley creates a mysterious and foreboding world that draws you in and refuses to let you go. With twists at every bend and jaw-dropping revelations throughout, each person begins to realize that their

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secrets aren't only terrible — they can also be deadly.

The Midnight Library by Matt Haig Fantasy // Viking

Matt Haig's newest book is magical in so many ways. *The Midnight Library* tells the story of Nora Seed, a 35-year-old music store clerk who feels stuck. With parents gone, a brother with whom she barely speaks, a best friend across the globe, and no love life to account for, Nora's situational depression hits a peak and she decides she no longer wants to live. Finding herself in between life and death at the Midnight Library, Nora is given the chance to live all the lives she could've had if she'd made different choices. But as she cycles through these fantastical alternate realities, she begins to understand what makes life worth living in the first place.

Haig's fantastic writing brings to life the magical place that is the Midnight Library, and with it, Nora and her life — well, lives. His own experience with depression translates beautifully onto the page, illustrating for readers the despair in wishing you had made other

choices in your life. Truly heartbreaking at times while uplifting at others, Haig has created a masterpiece in *The Midnight Library*.

I Would Leave Me If I Could. by Halsey Poetry // Simon & Schuster

In this heartbreaking, lyrical, and stunning collection, singer-songwriter Halsey — born Ashley Frangipane — weaves together a compelling narrative of love, loss, and dealing with mental illness. *I Would Leave Me If I Could*. is a phenomenal debut from Halsey, shedding light on the singer's tumultuous relationships ("Stockholm Syndrome Pt.1," "Lighthouse"); her childhood ("I Am Angry Because of My Father," "The Painter"); and her struggles with bipolar disorder ("Bad Day: I," "I Wish That I Were Manic All The Time"). Addressing other important themes and events in her life — bisexuality, sexual assault, and much more — Halsey bares her soul on the page for all to read.

Writing with passion and conviction, Halsey is truly one of the strongest and most compelling voices of her generation.



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The Legacy of Books Galore

Pioneers and preservation on upper Peach Street



ERIN PHILLIPS / CONTRIBUTED

By: Erin Phillips

These days, when you take a trip to upper Peach Street, it can be hard to imagine how this area of our town looked 100 years ago. Passing by car dealerships, chain restaurants, and massive superstores, it feels impossible that this area was once farmland and wilderness, with horses and buggies trudging through unpaved, sparsely populated dirt roads. There is, however, one surviving relic from those simpler times. Sandwiched between the corporate sprawl of the Millcreek Mall and the expanding reach of LECOM developments, sits the unassuming old storefront of Books Galore (five-time Best of Erie Winner for Best Comics and Collectibles Shop and Best Independent Bookstore).

Books Galore sells used books, comic books, and games and has been a part of the fabric of upper Peach Street for nearly 40 years, although the building has been there much longer. Built in 1920 by the pioneering spirit of one family, its survival is due to the legacy of the few families that have worked to make it what it is today.

The history of this area is inextricably tied to the Biebel family. Daniel and Charlotte Biebel immigrated to Erie County from Germany in the 1830s. Daniel originally worked as a bricklayer and was described as "hale and hearty," as he would prove to be when he eventually purchased large amounts of acreage in the Kearsarge area, started a timbering business, and built log cabins on site to live in while working. Their son, George Biebel, and his wife,

Mary, began the first commercial business on what is today upper Peach Street: a hotel and tavern called the Walnut Creek Hotel on the spot that is now the corner of Biebel Avenue and Peach Street. At that time, the area had a smattering of residents and the land where the Millcreek Mall now sits was farmland, as far as the eye could see. This tavern would have been a popular way station and watering hole for travelers coming into the city from further south in the county or state. They achieved great success, and it is upon that success that Mary and George's two sons, William and Edward, began multiple business ventures and eventually built the storefront at 5546 Peach St. in 1920 to be a general store for the area that was becoming more populated as the century

[left] A then and now comparison of the storefront windows of the shop at 5546 Peach St. Very little has changed, architecturally and design-wise, about the store since it was built in 1920. [bottom right] Long time employee, Bob Dobiesz (right) works the cash register, while Assistant Manager, Lisa Sciamanda, bags and boards comic books in the Gaming section.

tail ventures until 1983 when it was purchased by Duane Wallin and converted into his vision and dream: a used book store and comic book store, which it remains to this day.

Wallin was a voracious reader. He read any chance he could, loved books, and collected many over the years. Rather than retire in the traditional sense, Wallin decided to spend his golden years realizing a dream of his: to turn his passion into his work, and start a used bookstore. When the storefront at 5546 Peach St. went up for auction, Duane, his wife Mary Ann, and his son Jim toured the building and knew immediately that this was the place. The building looked and felt like it was meant to be a bookstore, and the family spent the next couple of years turning Duane's dream into a reality. Duane was the dreamer, Mary Ann the realist, and Jim was the muscle, hauling books all around town and building the bookshelves that are still in use today.

The building has remained largely unchanged since it was built in 1920. The Wallins were charmed by the woodwork and have kept it all intact over the years, including the original

wore on.

As far as I can tell, the Biebel family, their descendants, and their extended family owned the building up until the 1970s. It started by selling general wares, as described in Nelson's Biographical Dictionary and Reference Book of Erie County, PA: "He (Biebel) has enjoyed the liberal patronage which he seeks to deserve by carrying all the merchandise embraced in a general store: groceries, provisions, flour, feed, fertilizers, farming tools, hats, caps and notions." The store remained a general and grocery store until it was sold outside the Biebel family in the early 1970s. During this time, the business changed pretty regularly and enjoyed time as a photography studio, a dance studio, and multiple re-



ERIN PHILLIPS



ERIN PHILLIPS

accessibility, and close quarters are offset by the historic charm of the building.

Wallin started the business when the Millcreek Mall was being developed, and upper Peach Street and the Kearsarge area slowly started to morph into the bustling commercial district we know today. It was at this time that the Wallin Family and Books Galore became linked to the Phillips family (which also happens to be my family). When I first met my husband, he was working at Books Galore along with his brother Doug, his mother Marge, and his Aunt Carol. Most people who have shopped at Books Galore over the years think of this family as the personality of the store. Jim Wallin (who took over ownership of Books Galore, as well as his other property, the King's Rook Club, when his father, Duane, passed in 2001) reflects, "It really wouldn't have come together like it has or gone on as long as it has without the Phillips family." Marge and Doug Phillips both worked at the bookstore from around 1985 and stayed up until Marge's retirement in 2018. That's 33 years of dedication within one family to a retail business. Another long time employee, Bob Dobiesz, who has worked at the bookstore since 1990, points out "the dedication and length

of the employees' stay here is pretty unique." And their dedication to the business has inspired those employees running the store now to stay on and do their best to help this small business succeed. Current manager Cole Schenley reflects: "When I was a kid, I came here. I started shopping here when I was like 10 years old. This place means so much to me. Marge, Carol, Bob, everyone was always really kind to me all the years I shopped here. And then when I got this job, I felt this responsibility to keep it going, mainly for them."

It is not just the employees who keep coming back year after year; most of the customers of Books Galore are regulars and make visiting the shop a ritual of sorts. Comic books are serialized and new issues come out weekly or monthly, so most comic book customers are used to coming into the store every week to pick up their newly issued comics. Then those repeat customers bring their children with them who start up a weekly habit of buying comics, and so on and so on. "Legacy is a good word for it. I've seen kids come in and then they bring the next generation and then even their grandkids. People who came in here when they were kids and have since moved out of town always come in to visit

when they're back in Erie," reflects Dobiesz.

It is this legacy, this feeling of familiarity, comfort, and ritual that has contributed to this tiny bookstore's ability to survive the encroachment of big-box retailers, online sales juggernauts, as well as the pandemic. One can't help but worry about a small business and its ability to survive in the economic and public health crisis we're currently in, but Wallin feels confident: "I'll put it to you straight, I think that the bookstore will be fine. We have to weather the current pandemic storm, but our people are committed enough to jump in and fight for the bookstore. And our customers are so loyal, this place gives them a sense of comfort and a place to belong. It's an important part of their upbringing, it's their hobby and their life. It's going to be here as long as everybody who loves it wants it to be here and supports it." The legacy of the century-old shop on Peach Street, the legacy of the Biebel, Wallin, and Phillips families, and the legacy of multiple generations of customers will hopefully continue on for many more years to come.

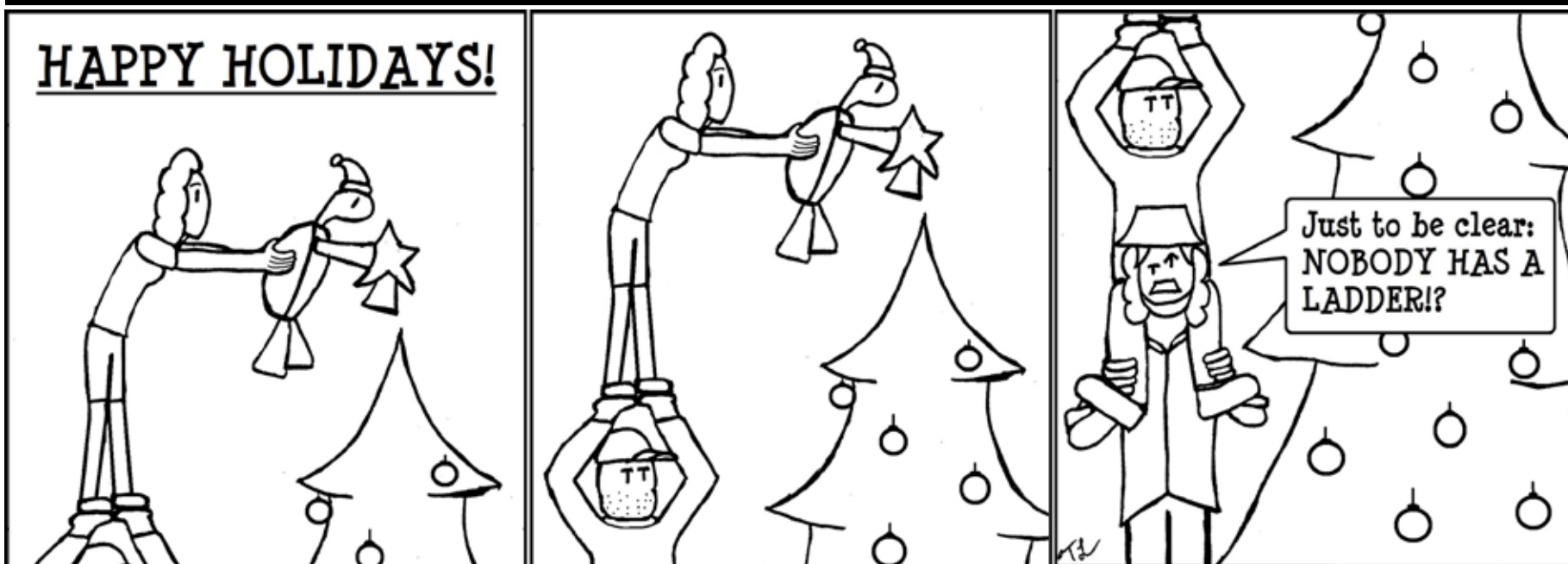
Erin Phillips runs the Instagram @olderieonfoot, an in-depth look at local architecture "by foot, stroller, papoose, bike, and occasionally minivan."

floors, trim, windows, doors and hardware, pocket doors, and glass doorknobs set in Art Deco style plate sets. As you make your way up the creaky wooden staircase, the second floor is the stuff of used bookstore dreams: books are piled up in every nook and cranny, closet, and alcove. This area of the store used to be rental apartments and still has a vintage bathroom (with unmodified sink, tub, and tile) and original kitchen cabinets in a back storage area. This level of preservation is unique in a re-

With used books piled into every dark and dusty corner, Books Galore is the stuff of used bookstore dreams.

tail setting in general, but most certainly unique for the upper Peach Street area, where nearly every building is either new or has been modernized over the years. And while this antiquation gives the bookstore its character, it also provides its share of frustrations, as most old buildings do. But issues such as lack of storage space,

TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK

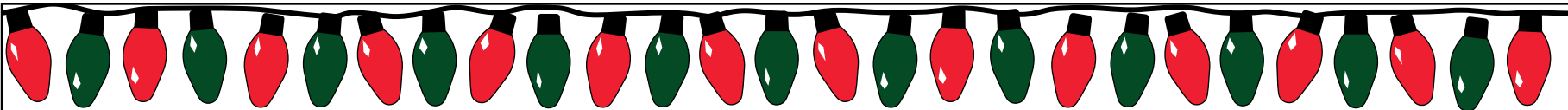
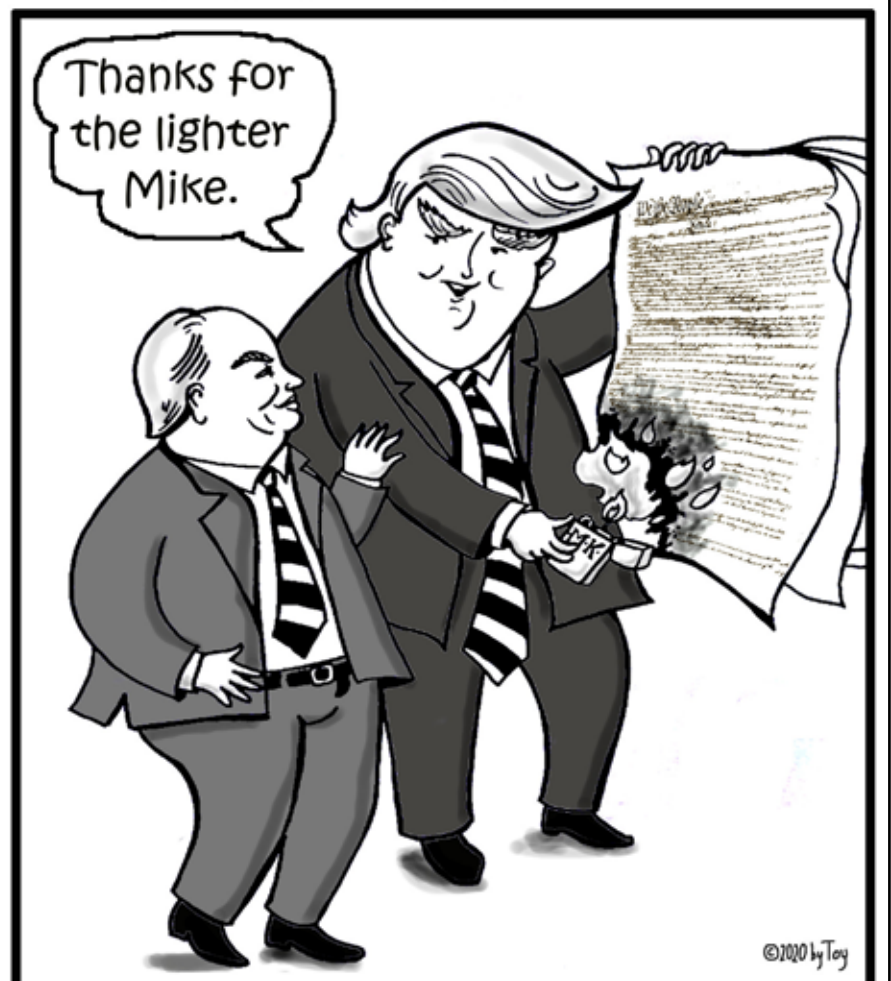


BACK TO THE 80s PART 3

BY BRAD PATTULLO
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JUST TOYIN' WITCHA — BY B. TOY



1210 West 26th Street • 2663 West 8th Street • 4478 Buffalo Road
STORE HOURS: MON. – SAT.: 7:30AM TO 7PM; SUN.: 9AM TO 3PM



SAVE \$5
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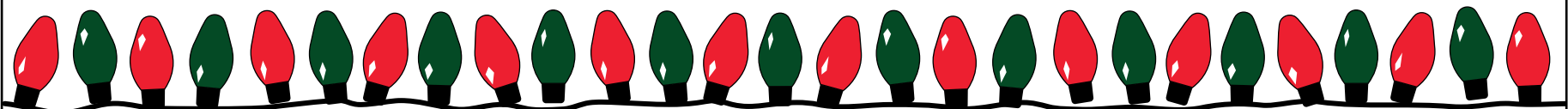
SAVE \$5
on RYO machines:
Top-o-Matic, Micro-Matic, T2

Coupon Expires
1/31/2021

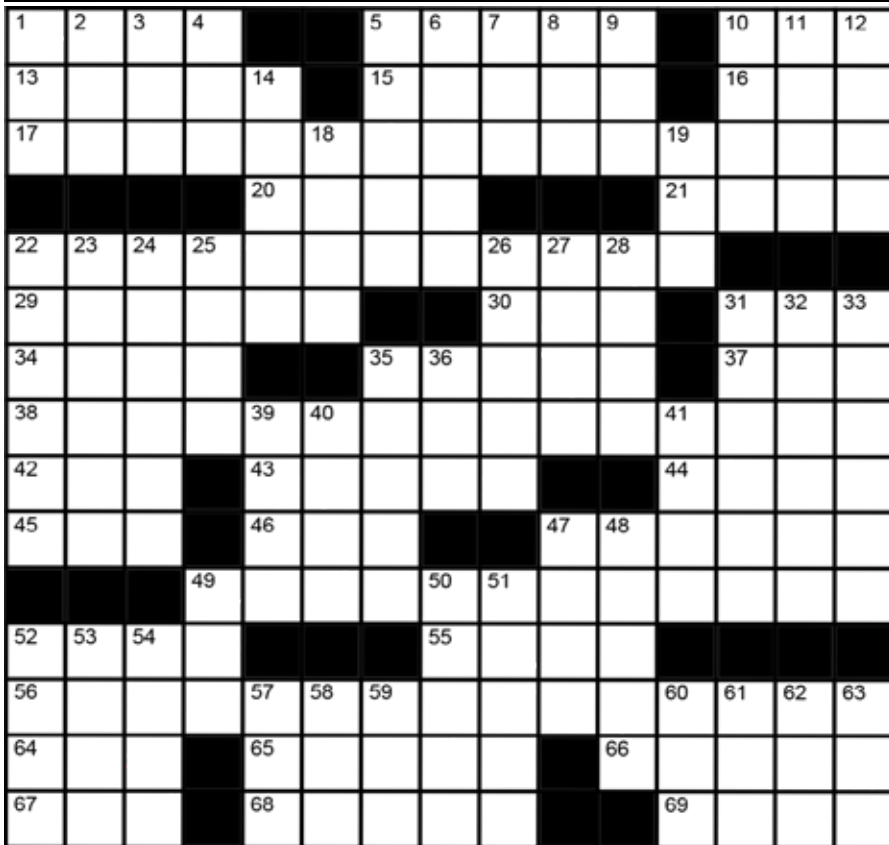


\$5 OFF
Element Kratom 200CT
Capsules & 200G Bags

Coupon Expires
1/31/2021



CROSSWORD



Across

1. Scratchy voice
5. Archipelago part
10. Cookie container
13. Pays (up)
15. Agitates
16. Palindromic brand in the kitchen
17. Comment from someone with their mouth covered?
20. Skye of "Say Anything ..."
21. "Bill & ___ Excellent Adventure"
22. Looking good when covering one's face?
29. Goes on a second date with
30. "Mad Men" channel
31. "Wheels"
34. "I could ___ horse!"
35. So far
37. Mine cart contents
38. Offerings provided by those favoring facial coverings?
42. ___ talk
43. More introverted
44. Fork prong
45. NFL rushing units
46. The Blue Jays, on scoreboards
47. Dance done to the 2015 hit "Watch Me"
49. The perfect facial covering for your feline?
52. Club ___

55. His Twitter handle is @ Pontifex
56. Hit reality competition series in which you can't see the person performing ... and this puzzle's theme
64. De-squeak
65. Alpha's opposite
66. Easily fooled
67. Washington, D.C. legalized it in 2014
68. First or economy
69. Secluded valley

Down

1. One making a ewe turn?
2. "Pick a card, ___ card"
3. Mo. town
4. Louvre pyramid designer I.M. ___
5. Neighbor of a Pakistani
6. Philosopher Kierkegaard
7. Falsehood
8. Tree in many street names
9. Wanders around JFK?
10. Laughing matter
11. Fired
12. Towel holders
14. Vengeful feeling
18. Beans high in protein
19. Investor's purchase: Abbr.
22. Like J.Crew clothing
23. Brought up
24. Prevents, by law
25. Jazz or Blues

26. Oscar ___ hot dogs
27. USA part: Abbr.
28. 1970s-'80s sketch show on which John Candy and Eugene Levy got their starts
31. Cancún kitchen
32. Skybox locales
33. Pursue again, as an elected position
35. Director Kurosawa
36. Opposite of NNW
39. Subj. for Galileo
40. One going on foot?
41. Unit in a shopping cart
47. Snoozes
48. Got room service, say
49. Hoover ___
50. Some digital videos, briefly
51. Musical endings
52. "Enough!"
53. Answer to the old riddle "What's round on the ends and high in the middle?"
54. Neighbor of a pec
57. Bronx-born congresswoman, familiarly
58. T-shirt choices, briefly
59. Mauna ___ (Hawaii's tallest mountain)
60. Unlikely race favorite
61. Dodgers legend Hodges
62. Expectant time
63. Kylo ___, "Star Wars" antagonist



Answers to last puzzle



ERIE COUNTY RENAISSANCE BLOCK PROGRAM Can Help Revitalize your Home & Neighborhood

**"This is a
real thing.**

I just hope anyone who wants to take
advantage of these grants makes the decision to do so.
I'd like to see as many people as possible benefit from this."

Linda Brown, homeowner

Ready to
Revitalize
your Block?
E·C·G·R·A
can help you
organize an
application



ECGRA's Renaissance Block Program awards grants to help revitalize Erie County neighborhoods through a block-by-block strategy that targets aging or neglected areas where neighbors are organized and willing to work together.

The Erie County Renaissance Block Program awards up to \$150,000 per application or up to \$5,000 awarded per property. It is a matching program that helps finance eligible exterior repairs, permanent improvements, and streetscapes. Funds can also be used to improve publicly owned property that is targeted to improve the block's visual appearance.



If you would like to learn how your home and neighborhood can organize an Erie County Renaissance Block Program application, please contact ECGRA.
814-897-2690 or tmichali@ecgra.org