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The Erie Reader is the local voice for news, arts, and culture, and is Erie's only independent, alternative newspaper. Founded in 2010, the Reader has quickly become the region's award-winning source for arts coverage, a strong cultural compass, and a dynamic resource for news and opinion. With a dedication to long-form journalism and a commitment to provoking thoughtful discussion, the Reader tells the stories of the people and places making and shaping Erie, while highlighting the events and issues influencing life in northwestern Pennsylvania. The Erie Reader is published every other week and distributed at over 250 high foot-traffic locations in Pennsylvania from North East to Girard to Edinboro. In addition to appearing in print, Erie Reader adds new content daily at ErieReader.com as well social media sites. All rights reserved. All content © Flagship Multimedia, Inc, 1001 State St., Suite 901, Erie, Pa, 16501. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission. The opinions of our columnists and contributors are their own and do not always reflect that of the editorial board or organization. Direct inquiries to 814.314.9364 or contact@ErieReader.com.

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From the Editors**We are what we eat.**

Fewer people make New Year's resolutions nowadays, and fewer still keep them. Nevertheless, weight loss remains the most popular choice among resolutionaries.

Obviously, health is a worthwhile goal. The problem is, weight can't measure health, and diets don't work.

In her 2013 TED talk, neuroscientist and science writer Sandra Aamodt cites "a study that looked at the risk of death over a 14-year period based on four healthy habits: eating enough fruits and vegetables, exercis[ing] three times a week, not smoking, and drinking in moderation." Unsurprisingly, those with all four healthy habits lived the longest.

But, as Aamodt explains, "Adding just one healthy habit pulls overweight people back into the normal range." The longevity of those who incorporated all four healthy habits was virtually unaffected by weight, Aamodt adds, surmising that "You can take control of your health by taking control of your lifestyle, even if you can't lose weight and keep it off."

Meanwhile, "Five years after a diet, most people have regained the weight," Aamodt states. "Forty percent of them have gained even more."

Regardless, in America, weight loss is a \$40 billion per year industry. And every January, millions of Americans hand it millions of dollars.

"If diets worked," Aamodt summarizes, "we'd all be thin already. Why do we keep doing the same thing and expecting different results?"

The problem seems to stem from how we measure health. We fixate on visible (and vain) measures like waistlines, when it's healthy practices that most determine long-term wellness.

And looks are deceiving in our community, too.

Just consider upper Peach Street recently: stores teemed with consumers pumping money into the economy. If full big-box parking lots were indicators of Erie's economic health, we'd be set.

But as Ben Speggen elucidates in this issue, dollars spent at corpo-

rate entities translate into far fewer positive impacts on community vitality, as compared to dollars spent at locally-owned small businesses.

And money we spend at many non-local companies can make us unwitting supporters of employee exploitation, environmental degradation, or corporate lobbying that hijacks our democratic process. Spending the bulk of our money at big-box stores may seem innocuous – and might save us a buck or two at the outset – but it ultimately leaves our community malnourished.

Similarly, Aamodt points out the not-so-harmless culture of diets. "At worst, they ruin lives: Weight obsession leads to eating disor-

The problem seems to stem from how we measure health. We fixate on visible (and vain) measures like waistlines, when it's healthy practices that most determine long-term wellness.

ders, especially in young kids. In the U.S., we have 80 percent of 10-year-old girls say they've been on a diet."

And it's no wonder. Children adopt the behaviors of the adults in their community. As Ti Sumner explains in her first feature for the *Reader*, studies show that the wellness of our children correlates with what they see modeled by adults.

So as we enter 2016, our attention shouldn't be on how much we need to lose. Instead, we should devote it to how much we stand to gain by acknowledging that the health of our community – and its future – depends on the everyday choices each of us make.

If we genuinely want wellness for ourselves and all of Erie, it's time to put our money where our mouth is.

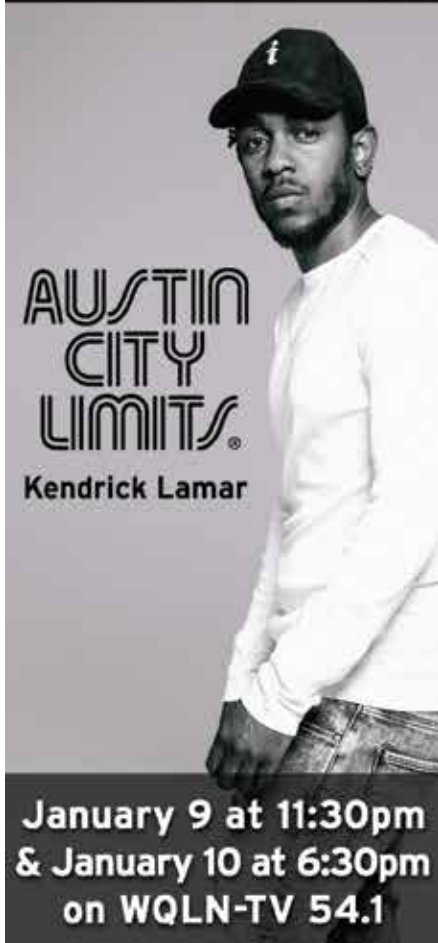


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NEWS & OPINION

Erie at Large

Guns and Drugs

By: Jim Wertz

As a community, we spent all of 2014 and most of 2015 talking about gun violence. And rightfully so.

But the most dangerous plague facing the Erie region may not be things that go pop in the night.

Media reports of gun violence and the firsthand accounts that echo those reports have made the community fearful of the future and, I'm afraid to say, many have become fearful of one another. Such fear only highlights the many social, economic, and geographic elements that divide us rather than the social, economic, and geographic interests that should unify Erie as we stare down the barrel of gun violence.

But there's more.

As we clamor for safety and security from what many perceive to be someone else's problem, an equally, if not more, insidious threat lurks in our community: increasingly lethal rates of drug addiction.

The genesis of this epidemic is the rapid ascent of prescription drug abuse in the U.S. The front lines of the war we now wage are communities across the country – Erie included – where people seek out dangerously inferior substitutes to the prescription medication they've become dependent upon.

"This addiction epidemic was made in America," wrote Tom Ashbrook, host of NPR's *On Point*. "Fueled by American pharmaceutical companies churning out mountains of opioid pills. Enabled by doctors looking to deal with pain. Embraced by Americans for all kinds of reasons. [It's] followed up by cheap heroin when the prescriptions run out."

Erie County saw a nearly 30 percent increase in heroin and opiate drug abuse in 2015, according to the Erie County Office of Drug and Alcohol Abuse. When you compare the rise in drug use with the rise in violent crime, Erie must face some stark realities, including the fact that drug abuse and fatal overdoses rival incidents of violent gun crimes.

Nationally, nearly a third of inmates in state correctional facilities and more than a quarter of federal inmates committed their crimes while pursuing or under the influence of drugs. Prior to 2001, the vast majority of drug-related



MIROSLAV PRAGI

In Erie County, sixty people died of drug-related causes in 2014. That's nearly five times the number of people killed by gun violence.



PATRICK IRELAND

offenses involved marijuana or cocaine. Since 2001, however, authorities have witnessed a rise in the use of opioids and heroin. It's a shift largely attributed to the overprescription of opioid based pain medication, including Vicodin, Oxycodone, and OxyContin.

From 1999 to 2011 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported a 500 percent increase in the use of opioids and a 400 percent increase in fatal opioid overdoses. The number of people seeking treatment for opioid addiction has increased 900 percent during the same period of time.

Last September, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the use of OxyContin for patients as young as 11 years old, specifically for those who have chronic pain determined to be untreatable by other means.

Critics of the FDA's decision question the morality of allowing major pharmaceutical companies to increase market share by prescribing such powerful medication to pediatric patients. "You're talking about [Purdue], a pri-

vately held company where executives have faced criminal charges for the way they marketed OxyContin," Andrew Kolodny, director of Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing, told the *Washington Post*.

The preponderance of opioid prescriptions written in the past 15 years is viewed by many in the medical community as ground zero for the current opioid and heroin crisis in the U.S. That's because patients who are treated with opioids and become addicted frequently transition to heroin when prescription drugs become harder to find. Heroin is also less expensive. According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, 75 percent of people who become addicted to opioid medications switch to heroin because it's cheaper.

In Pennsylvania, state police seized record amounts of heroin between January and July of 2015, and saw a small decline in heroin-related activity in the second half of the year. But across the Commonwealth, the effects of opioid and heroin addiction remain profound with an average of seven people dying from drug overdoses each day.

In Erie County, the statistics are equally startling. Sixty people died of drug-related causes in 2014. That's nearly five times the number of people killed by gun violence. Almost 40 percent of those drug-related fatalities were exclusively heroin-related.

Heroin-related fatalities in 2015 account for more than 50 percent of the drug-related deaths in Erie County, according to the Erie County coroner's office. There were 63 confirmed overdose deaths and nine cases still pending toxicology reports at the end of the year.

To try and stem this crisis, first responders now carry Naloxone, also known as Narcan, a powerful anti-overdose medication that reverses the effects of opioids in similar ways that a shot of epinephrine might reverse the effects of a dangerous allergic reaction. The CDC will soon publish new guidelines for prescribing opioids to patients with chronic pain; and many states are diverting drug offenders out of the criminal justice system and into drug courts and treatment programs, marking a shift away from the criminalization of addiction for the first time in nearly four decades.

Officials in Erie County have also formed the Heroin Overdose Community Awareness Task Force, a group that hopes to establish a database that will help target interventions to reduce drug overdose and drug abuse, generally, according to David Sanner, director of the Erie County Office of Drug and Alcohol Abuse.

It's a public health approach to a public health epidemic.

When a gun is fired, neighborhoods are tested and courage is tried.

But the last gasp of a dying addict is equally disruptive to the peace of the city, or a neighborhood, or a home.

Jim Wertz can be reached at jWertz@ErieReader.com, and you can follow him on Twitter @jim_wertz.

Just a Thought

We are dancing animals.

By: Katie Chriest

On Dec. 29, a power outage interrupted much of Erie, including where I was working from home.

No power meant no Wi-Fi, and no Wi-Fi meant no connection to the world online, where most of my work takes place. Mild frustration tinged with fear tightened my jaw and shallowed my breath. How was I going to get anything done now? What if this isn't resolved quickly? What about plans, routines, *deadlines*?

Then I noticed the silence. The furnace wasn't kicking on — not a welcome quiet for long (as many locals could attest that day), but soothing for a spell. No appliances knocked and hummed. No electrical buzz droned dissonantly against my noisy mind.

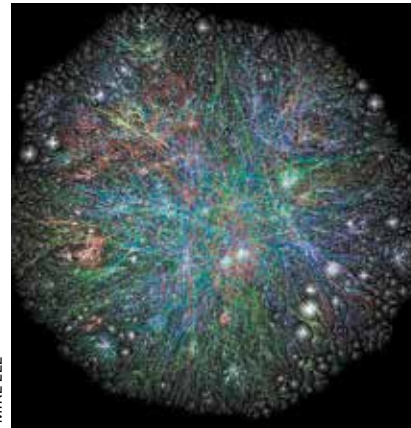
Outside, too, felt placid and mild. So I took a walk. Noticeable quiet blanketed the neighborhood. A couple of neighbors emerged and we commiserated about our powerless plight. That simple, rare connection was reassuring in ways I hadn't even realized I needed.

I passed other folks outside as I walked down toward the lake: some picking up wind-tossed sticks, some just milling about. I smiled, recalling a 2003 headline in *The Onion*: "48-Hour Internet Outage Plunges Nation Into Productivity."

Milling about is its own form of productivity, one we stubbornly undervalue in our hyper-scheduled, machine-driven world. That walk set free ideas I'd been unwittingly imprisoning by staring into a screen, trying to wrestle them out of my algorithm-aided brain.

The lake, still ruffled and haughty after its slugfest with high winds, nevertheless calmed me. Maybe it was the trees clinging to the cliff for longer than any of us will cling to life. Or the enormous presence of the lake, itself: the closest thing to permanence we have, and much more aligned with our own wild roots than the devices we've built our lives around.

In *A Man Without a Country*, Kurt Vonnegut writes, "we have contraptions like computers that cheat you out of becoming. Bill Gates says, 'Wait till you see what your computer can



MIKE LEE

Milling about is its own form of productivity, one we stubbornly undervalue in our hyper-scheduled, machine-driven world.

become.' But it's you who should be doing the becoming, not the damn fool computer. What you can become is the miracle you were born to be through the work that you do."

The tricky part for many of us now, of course, is that the work that we do and the computer are interdependent. It is only with illogical hypocrisy that I bemoan our reliance on the very technology that allows me the freedom to work sometimes from home, or during odd hours, or, really, at all.

And I am daily in awe of the *Reader* community we reach digitally; and their potential to have a democratic conversation about the issues we publish, simply by pushing the comment button.

But Vonnegut would be nonplussed. "Electronic communities build nothing," he insists. "You wind up with nothing."

"Nothing" may be a little extreme. Nonetheless, sometimes it's valuable to lose what we thought we needed. To be reminded of our resilience and flexibility, and that there is no substitute for neighbors, for quiet, for that inconceivably phenomenal lake of ours. And that real power comes from people, not plugs.

"We are dancing animals," concludes Vonnegut. "How beautiful it is to get up and go out and do something. We are here on Earth to fart around. Don't let anybody tell you any different."

Katie Chriest can be contacted at katie@ErieReader.com.



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News of the Weird

Redefining the "fanny pack," and other strange uses of mind and body.

By: Chuck Shepherd

One-man Arsenal

According to the flabbergasted sheriff of rural Chesterfield County, South Carolina, "This has completely changed our definition of (what constitutes) an 'ass-load' of guns." Brent Nicholson, 51, had been storing more than 7,000 firearms (most of them likely stolen) in his home and a storage building on his property. Every room of the house was stacked with weapons, and it took four tractor-trailer trips to haul everything away, with help of 100 law-enforcement officers. Nicholson also had 500 chainsaws, at least 250 taxidermied deer, elk, and alligator heads, and more. No motive was obvious to deputies. (Nicholson would still be living in the shadows today if he hadn't run that stop sign on Oct. 21 with bogus license plates on his truck.) [WSOC-TV (Charlotte, N.C.), 11-11-2015] [Headlines & Global News (New York), 12-5-2015]

Police Report

The Human Fanny Pack: Brandon Wilson, 26, was arrested in November in Cedar Rapids, Iowa his second bust of 2015 in which a substantial number of crack cocaine "baggies" were found in his rectum. Fifty-one were recovered this time (counting the ones with marijuana), down from the 109

discovered in his February arrest. Police in November also found \$1,700 cash on him (but just in his pocket). [KCRG-TV (Cedar Rapids), 12-1-2015]

Leading Economic Indicators

Following the release of Apple's yearly financials in October (and based on sales of its iPhone 6), the company announced that, apart from other assets, it was sitting on \$206 billion in cash about like owning the entire gross domestic product of Venezuela, but all in cash. Another way of expressing it: Using only its cash, Apple could buy every single NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL team, plus the 20 most valuable international soccer teams and still have plenty left. Or, as the BGR.com blog also pointed out, it could instead simply give every man, woman and child in America \$646 (coincidentally, about what a new iPhone 6 sells for). [BGR.com, 11-3-2015]

Even if Armageddon doesn't happen, the CEO of the massive online retailer Overstock.com believes there is a "10 to 20 percent" chance of a world financial meltdown in the next few years, and he is arranging to be back in business in the aftermath. Patrick Byrnes told the New York Post in November he has stashed away enough food in a well-fortified facility in Utah's Granite Mountain to serve

his 2,000 employees for "30 to 60 days," along with several thousand other emergency preparations and \$10 million in gold. But, he insisted, he's not a gun-toting "prepper"; the plan is only about tiding employees over until the Internet and banking systems are back up and running. [New York Post, 11-15-2015]

The Continuing Crisis

In November in Harare, Zimbabwe, Mison Sere, 42, was judged winner of the 4th annual "Mister Ugly" contest after showcasing his seemingly random dental arrangement (some teeth there, some not) and "wide range of grotesque facial expressions," according to an Associated Press dispatch. However, many in the crowd thought their favorite was even uglier and threatened to riot. "I am naturally ugly," said a jealous (former winner) William Masvinu; "He (Sere) is ugly only when he opens his mouth." [BBC News, 11-23-2015]

Cool Moms? (1) Jennifer Terry, 44, was charged with driving her daughter and several other minors around Riverdale, Utah, in August to facilitate their tossing eggs at 10 to 20 homes. Some damage was reported, but so far, Terry is the only one charged. (2) Mandy Wells, 32, told police that she thought "for a minute" that it was a bad idea, "but did it any-

way" she invited 10 kids (aged 12 to 14) to her home for a party and served beer and marijuana. Wells, of Springtown, Texas, said her daughter, 14, smokes marijuana because the girl (go figure!) suffers from depression. [Ogden Standard examiner, 12-1-2015] [The Smoking Gun, 11-25-2015]

Wait, What?

Kuala Lumpur International Airport took out ads in two Malaysian daily newspapers in December to find the owners of three Boeing 747-200Fs parked there for months (one for at least a year) and threatening to auction them off in 14 days if not claimed. Two are white, and one is "off-white" (if the reader is checking his inventory). The planes' last listed owner said it sold them in 2008. [CNN, 12-8-2015]

Updates

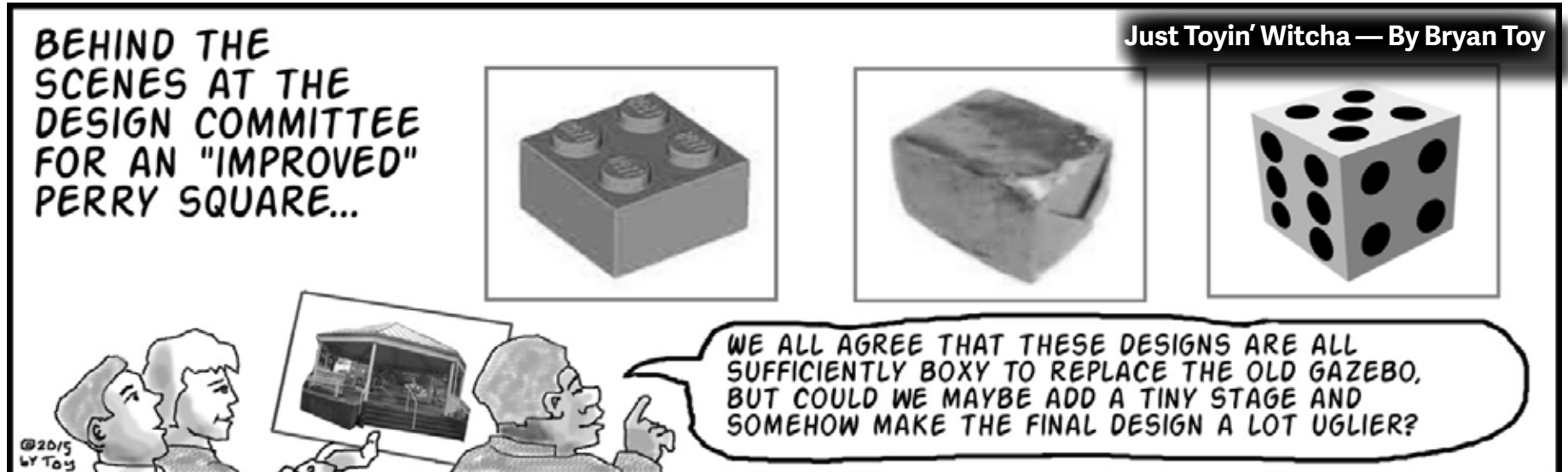
Russian artist Pyotr Pavlensky, 31, has devoted his career to getting on the government's nerves and succeeded once again in November. (News of the Weird last mentioned him in 2013 when he nailed his scrotum to the floor in Moscow's Red Square to protest police oppression.) In his latest event, he set fire to the front door of the headquarters of Russia's security service (the FSB, formerly KGB) and has been detained though from his cell, he de-

manded his charge of "vandalism" be changed to "terrorism." A member of the Russian band Pussy Riot called the door fire "the most important work of contemporary art of recent years." Pavlensky once sewed his lips together protesting arrests of Pussy Riot. [Global Post (Boston), 12-3-2015]

Following prosperous news reported here (from New York, the Czech Republic and Massachusetts), the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster of New Zealand announced on Dec. 10 that the country's official records now recognize the Church as a legal sanctioner of marriages. The Church must now nominate an "official marriage celebrant" (who will be known as "His Noodly Honour"). [Stuff.co.nz (Wellington), 12-15-2015]

Least Competent Criminals

Matthew Riggins had told his girlfriend earlier that he and a pal were planning to burglarize some homes around Barefoot Bay in Brevard County, Florida, and was apparently on that mission on Nov. 23 when an alert resident called 911, and the men scrambled. The accomplice was caught several days later, but Riggins himself did not survive the night having taken refuge in nearby woods and drowning trying to outswim an apparently hungry 11-foot alligator. [WFTV (Orlando), 12-8-2015]



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Erie, It's High Time We Make Some Tough Choices About Our Future

Because if we don't, we may not have a future to argue over, as 2016 goes out with a whimper and not a bang.

By: Ben Speggen

Esqire published a feature last month in which the staff worked with some of the big fish at Brookings, the Washington, D.C.-based think tank. The Hearst Corporation-published monthly magazine that dates back to 1933 described Brookings as "a bullshit-free zone of critical inquiry, original research, and public-policy solution for one hundred years. Home to three hundred experts and thinkers on nearly every topic of national and global import, Brookings is nonpartisan, nonprofit, and all ideas, all the time."

The feature explored choices facing Americans in the coming year. Absent was the upcoming presidential election, because let's face it: That's taken the lion's share of mainstream coverage, often distracting Americans from other pressing concerns.

The choices outlined in *Esquire* with the help of Brookings encapsulate the kind of future Americans want for their country and for themselves. The issues include climate change, corporate tax loopholes, infrastructure, immigration, legalization of marijuana, and more; and it all leads up to a simple, yet pressing question: *Should we make America great again?*

Instead of writing a book report on this significant, well-argued, well-thought-out feature, I'll say you ought to read it. To make it even easier, I've provided the link [<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Blogs/brookings-now/2015/11/Future-of-America-Esquire-Dec-2015.pdf?la=en>] to the piece at ErieReader.com.

Similarly themed and also available at [<http://www.eriereader.com/article/2015-the-year-of>] is the column I wrote in the year-end issue of the



The next mayor of Erie will very likely determine the next decade in the short-term and could end up influencing the next several decades in the long-term. But it isn't the only choice we have to make regarding this city's and region's destinies.

to make sense of 365 disjointed days. We're ascribing a narrative to a story already written ... Let's start locally and declare what we want to see and – more importantly – what we want to do in Erie during 2016 ... Otherwise, we're staring down the past while the future passes us, only to become the past we evaluate next year."

The essence of the *Esquire*/Brookings report on Americans' choices can be distilled on the local level and applied to Erie. We also face unavoidable opportunities to make choices that will define Erie and its future.

And this year we **[Cont. on page 10]**

Geeked Out

The year of reading about big ideas.

By: John Lindvay

Recently, I realized how bizarre of a year 2015 really was: It was the year I played fewer video games and read more books.

This might not come off as some grand revelation, but for me it's an oddity. I work in the games industry. In 2014 I played over 100 different games, the majority to completion. But in 2015, I finished maybe a dozen games, and only started a couple dozen more.

And it's wasn't for a lack of great games to come out last year, that's for sure! Many awesome games were released, like the final Kojima Metal Gear, Fallout 4, and The Witcher 3. So what happened?

Coincidentally, I turned 30. This milestone weighed on my mind all year. Major age milestones tend to consume you.

You think about what you've done so far and what you still wish to accomplish.

I've been playing games my whole life, and a few years ago I started my journey to break into the industry. I consumed games, examined them, figured out how they worked, and then talked to the people who made them to figure out the how and why behind it all. This was the creation of BigSushi.fm, a weekly podcast I still host. It started with me and two others, and now it's down to just me. I then got my first job in the industry at the middle of 2014, and in 2015 I left that position to start a new position with a studio that I admire and on a project I love.

As I approached 30, I couldn't help but think about how, even with all of this, I'm still far from my professional and personal goals. So instead of

investing in new video game experiences, I found myself playing what I was most familiar with.

In truth, almost all games felt like too much of an investment of time and, at times, fruitless. I would ask myself, what am I getting from this? What am I learning or experiencing?

The video game equivalent of comfort food is playing games you've already sunk countless hours into. They don't tax you

the way games with epic stories or gameplay challenges do.

In truth, almost all games felt like too much of an investment of time and, at times, fruitless. I would ask myself, what am I getting from this? What am I learning or experiencing? Since I couldn't be bothered to invest in the game's story or novel gameplay, I found myself utterly disinterested. And I think it's natural to fall in and out of excitement for games.

In that time that games used to consume, I found myself reading more. Not just Internet articles or news stories; but books, tangible books made of dead trees.

I was reminded what it felt like to read books and to quench that thirst for new information. I read works by Albert Camus, revisited classics by Salinger and Hemingway, and continued my

slow read through Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. I read my first Virginia Woolf novel. I explored behavioral economics in Richard Thaler's *Misbehavior*, which brought me to Daniel Kahneman's incredibly insightful *Thinking Fast and Slow*, about how humans make decisions.

While in many ways 2015 was an odd year, it brought me back to something fundamental. I love learning, and books are still some of the best ways to learn about new ideas and experiences. Perhaps what I am trying to get at is this: This year, let's resolve to take time to read about big ideas, and break up the cycle of mindlessly consuming media.

John Lindvay can be contacted at jLindvay@ErieReader.com, and you can follow him on Twitter @Fightstrife.



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[Cont. from page 8]

even get an extra day.

Erie, too, has a critical upcoming election – worthy of extensive scrutiny and coverage – to which many eyes, column inches, and soundbites will be devoted. The next mayor of Erie will very likely determine the next decade in the short-term and could end up influencing the next several decades in the long-term. But it isn't the only choice we have to make regarding this city's and region's destinies.

"We forget this at our peril: America is not an act of God. America is an act of will," reads the introduction of the *Esquire*/Brookings feature.

Erie, too, is an act of will.

So it's time we who have the will in Erie look at the tough choices we must make this year about our future. Because if we don't, we may not have a future to argue over, as 2016 goes out with a whimper and not a bang. That's why this column will focus on the tough choices of 2016 and I invite you to be part of it.

Like the Socratic conclusion drawn by *Esquire*/Brookings, we must ask ourselves: *Should* we make Erie great again? But as that piece points out in the national case, this question reveals two key things: First, Erie isn't great already; and second, greatness should extend to *all* Erieites – not just a select few.

Although many small-business owners on the come-up, refugees with a new lease on life, and appreciators of sunsets over water will tell you Erie's pretty damn good, we can all agree that Erie could be better.

We can agree further that the definition of greatness is determined largely by which Erie – the inner city, the sprawled suburbs, or the rural extensions spiderwebbing deep into the county – you call home. "Greatness" even differs between those who live west of State Street and those who live east of the urban divide.

So Erie, it's time we look ahead and declare 2016 the Year of Choices. We must remember that progress is an Act of Will, not an Act of God. But we must also remember that taking no action – thereby letting the city wither from an indifference-fueled drought – is also a choice.

Ben Spегgen can be contacted at bSpегgen@ErieReader.com, and you can follow him on Twitter @BenSpегgen.

Hunger Should Not Be a Punishment for People who Struggle to Find Work

Thousands of Pennsylvanians are about to lose their SNAP benefits. Here's how you can help.

By: **Brian Cabaday and Louise Hayes**

Imagine trying to find a job in this challenging economy. Now, imagine trying to find a job in this economy when you are skipping meals, living off of ramen noodles instead of fresh vegetables, and having to choose between paying the gas bill and eating regularly. For thousands of people in Pennsylvania, this will soon be a reality.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), is a vital tool that helps people stretch their limited budgets. SNAP helps to make sure that struggling families, veterans, children, and seniors get enough to eat each day. It also plays an important role in ensuring that adults who are experiencing tough times are able to maintain their health while weathering the storm. In 2014, SNAP helped an average of 46 million Americans every month, including almost 1.9 million right here in Pennsylvania.

Unfortunately, beginning in 2016 in some areas of Pennsylvania, including all of Erie County, adults without children in the household, and who are not disabled, will be subject to a three-month SNAP time limit unless they are working 20 hours a week or meet certain exemptions. SNAP benefits are modest – averaging about \$1.40 per person per meal. Yet even this small "hand-up" can make a huge difference in someone's ability to weather our economic downturn until they can find work. Finding a job in this economy is difficult enough. To do so while choosing between paying bills and eating right can feel insurmountable.

The people who are about to lose their SNAP benefits are some of the poorest in Erie. This population includes youth who are aging out of foster care, people who struggle to find work because of criminal records or low literacy, and veterans. It also includes people who are trying to work more than 20 hours

per week, but can't find the hours because employment opportunities are not available or they lack the time and technology to perform a job search while juggling the other difficulties of their lives. Those living in the rural parts of Erie County may find searching for a job especially challenging, as there are few, if any, options for public transportation.

To be frank, this time limit will further punish people because they can't find a job, including some of the more than 7,400 people in Erie County who are currently struggling with unemployment.

In total, there are approximately 100,000 people in Pennsylvania who fall into this category, although

Approximately 30,000 people in Pennsylvania stand to lose their SNAP benefits. This will be especially harmful to Erie, which has a poverty rate of 25.1 percent – the fourth-highest of any major city in the state.

about 70,000 people will be protected by a geographic waiver because of high unemployment in their area, or because they are exempt. That means that approximately 30,000 people in Pennsylvania stand to lose their SNAP benefits. This will be especially harmful to Erie, which has a poverty rate of 25.1 percent – the fourth-highest of any major city in the state.

In other words, you might know someone who is about to go hungry.

Fortunately, there are ways that you can help. First, help members of your community figure out if they are exempt, so they don't lose their benefits. Adults between the ages of 18 and 50, without kids living with them, can be exempt if they're receiving or applying for unemployment compensation, participating in a drug or alcohol treatment program, or have a disability.

Second, if you do know someone who gets cut off from SNAP, let them know that they have a right to appeal the decision. Those appealing

can keep their benefits while they figure out if they meet an exemption or find a community service opportunity.

Third, you can assist the people you know, as well as your community, by helping them find community service placements. One of the ways that people can keep their SNAP benefits is by volunteering through community service to "work for benefits." This can allow someone time to search for a job while also helping their community and keeping SNAP. Nonprofit or religious organizations and government sites can help people keep SNAP by hosting them as volunteers for seven hours a week.

Although the economy has certainly improved from the depths of the recession, there are still millions of men and women unable to find stable employment. Many people are only able to find a small number of work hours. Meanwhile, the struggle to deal with insufficient income can sap the energy and money needed for the job search.

People who are trying to find work shouldn't be punished, and no one should be forced to go hungry.

In order to prevent people from losing their SNAP benefits, Congress could repeal this time limit altogether, recognizing that we have not fully recovered from the recession and that the health of our community members impacts all of us.

In the meantime, if you can help neighbors, co-workers, or community members to put food on the table by connecting them with volunteer opportunities or helping them figure out if they still qualify for benefits, you will make a huge difference to them. At a time when people are about to go hungry, it's all hands on deck.

Brian Cabaday is a Paralegal at Northwestern Legal Services in Erie. Louise Hayes is a Supervising Attorney at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia. For more information about these changes, visit clsphila.org/ABAWDs.



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A Regional Look Forward to 2016

From reclaiming our neighborhoods to developing our workforce, success is well within Erie's grasp.



By: Jay Breneman, County Councilman, District 4

While many like to reflect upon the failures or successes of the past year, I'd like to take a moment to pronounce some opportunities in the year ahead.

Not being a fan of offering false hope, I've selected a few areas that have already received considerable traction, time, thought, and debate.

Equally, I'm a firm believer that challenges are not to be avoided, but are meant to be tested and conquered. All matters I address impact our taxpayers, faith communities, neighborhoods, businesses, schools, nonprofits, municipalities, and our county as a whole. Success won't be achieved easily, but it is well within our grasp.

Inter-Governmental Collaboration

After over 20 years of service, the Erie Area Council of Governments (COG) is entering a new phase in reducing the financial burdens of our county's 38 municipalities – and possibly its 13 school districts and multiple authorities – while improving their ability to serve the public they represent.

Member governments and their representatives, myself included, are determined to continue our teamwork and leverage our combined bargaining power on anything from asphalt to technology. This means ongoing and thorough collaborative self-analysis to meet the changing needs of our member governments, and to play an enhanced and functional role for all area governmental entities for the better-

ment of our region and those who call Erie County home.

Reclaiming Forgotten Neighborhoods

Over the past year and a half, City Councilman David Brennan and I, along with my graduate intern Paige Bosnyak and a long list of other community representatives, have been working on a strategy to reinvest in one of Erie County's hardest hit neighborhoods on Erie's east side.

What sparked as an idea to transform a blighted stretch of land along a former rail line – the very rail line Mayor Tullio fought for decades to remove – has grown into a low-cost endeavor to reconnect dead-end neighborhoods, provide safe travel to nearby schools and parks, clean up (literally) tons of garbage and waste, eliminate the open invitation for crime, and stabilize property values while providing a focal point for economic growth.

This project, the Eastside Opportunity Corridor, will soon be awarded a \$5,000 community grant from Erie County's gaming funds. These funds will be used to leverage more funding from other grant sources, and to revitalize a neighborhood that is decades behind in basic livability standards.

Regional Transit

With the looming expiration of the EMTA 50-year charter, county government has vocally expressed a desire to change the organization and those it serves. These changes can only be addressed within the charter framework because they are fundamental

to its operations and funding. We cannot rubber stamp what is essentially a business contract and expect to negotiate details after the fact.

Those of us who call the City of Erie home can no longer afford to be double-taxed for regional services, and the region must step up to the plate and relieve the city of its unnecessary financial burden. This needed change will dramatically expand Erie's ability to effectively deal with issues of violence and livability. If Erie does not have the resources and gumption to address these concerns now, families and businesses will continue to flee from its high tax rate and deteriorating neighborhoods, and the region will suffer as our largest municipality continues to decline.

The path forward must include equitable and permanent representation by the region which collectively pays the bills, and the ridership (current and future) who know the system best. No matter where you live in Erie County, and no matter your age or income bracket, you deserve dependable and

Having meetings, spending money, cutting ribbons, and making announcements are both ineffective and wasteful when they are done merely for the sake of doing something.

accessible transportation to all of our communities, including Erie.

I urge care and meaningful work by all sides on this matter. We cannot afford to let this process devolve into petty politicking or passive leadership.

Workforce development

Our future economy, and our future tax base, rest in the hands of Erie County's largest segment of the population: Millennials.

Our economic problems have little to do with "brain drain," and everything to do with the thousands of young peo-

ple who lack both the skills to replace a retiring workforce, and the ability to meet the needs of an expanding or re-locating industry.

This is not a crisis that our educational institutions can solve alone, nor is it a matter to be left solely to one group or level of government. Municipalities must particularly be in the driver's seat on this one because their future – and the future of our entire region – depends upon the capabilities of our workforce to meet the needs of high-skill industries.

More simply: A skilled workforce is a better incentive to do business in Erie than any amount of tax credits.

Violence

Whether you refuse to give up on your neighborhood, or you fled to a different community hoping to protect your children, yourself, or your property, every one of you pays for the rising cost of violence in our region.

Policing alone is not the solution. There is nothing simple about the root causes of violence, which means our responses should be equally multi-faceted, adaptive, and proactive.

It will take time. But, more importantly, it will take leaders from all sectors working together and not letting up. The worst we could do is initiate efforts to combat violence, and set those efforts on cruise control.

Output vs. Outcome

It's not enough to do a lot. We could busy ourselves with a thousand initiatives and end up with nothing to show in the end.

Every volunteer, voter, engaged citizen, community leader, business professional, and elected official has to ensure that we establish clear expectations for transformative change as an end result of all that we do.

Having meetings, spending money, cutting ribbons, and making announcements are both ineffective and wasteful when they are done merely for the sake of doing something.

Our key to a successful 2016 rests in the hands of those who have an outcome in mind, and will work – and I mean *really* work – with others to get the job done.

Jay Breneman can be contacted at jbreneman@eriecountygov.org.



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IT's about time.

Erie Ale Works and Millcreek Brewing Company

Erie's newest breweries add even more distinction to our thriving craft beer scene.



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Since opening about two months ago, Millcreek Brewing Company's wide range of beers and "left-of-center" pub food have earned numerous fans. Opposite: Erie Ale Works' DIY model influences the beers they make, the music they host, and the food trucks who regularly park there.

It's only been about two months since Millcreek Brewing opened, and they're "focusing on the food and the service" most at the moment, says operations manager (and longtime Erie-area restaurant professional) Tamara Salchak.

After all, Salchak says, "without those two things, there's no sense in being here."

Along with its lineup of 30 original and outside-the-house beers on tap, the fare Millcreek Brewing brings to its tables is just "a little left-of-center ... pub food with a little bit of gourmet flair," says Salchak.

From its increasingly popular house soups and entree salads to its Bratwurst Rumaki and impressive Reuben sandwiches, she says, "we're trying to [present] a touch of gourmet without being so weird that no one wants to try it."

So far, from what patrons are saying, it seems that Millcreek Brewing – like the city's longer-established breweries and brewpubs – is hitting its marks in Erie:

"We had a great first experience at this relatively new brewpub/restaurant," said one visitor who recently left a five-star review on Millcreek Brewing's Facebook page. "We enjoyed the food. [My dining partner] loved the selection of beverages, and they even had a pretty good glass of wine for me. I almost forgot to mention that the bartender was knowledgeable and friendly. We'll be back!"

Those accolades are just the kind of testimonial that MBC's partners and their roughly 30 staff members are aiming for, says Salchak.

In order to be successful, "we've gotta grab the demographic that exists here," says Salchak, and work to serve it well.

That can be said of both Millcreek Brewing Company and Erie Ale Works – of all food-and/or-drink establishments, really.

And, along with the other members of northwestern Pennsylvania's ever-growing microbrew/brewpub scene (the Brewererie at Union Station, Lavery Brewing Company, and Erie Brewing Company right here in Erie; Sprague Farm & Brew Works in Venango; Voodoo Brewing and Timbercreek Tap & Table in Meadville; and Blue Canoe Brewery in Titusville) they are grabbing that demographic well.

In doing the beer-making, etc. thing, all very much in their own

In doing the beer-making, etc. thing, all very much in their own ways, these fine establishments recognize and celebrate each other for who they are and what they're all about.

ways – and with love, their own hands and backs and creative minds, and a whole lot of cooperation and camaraderie among them – these fine establishments recognize and celebrate each other for who they are and what they're all about.

It's like they're giving each other – and the Erie area – one great, big beer hug.

And it seems they're all in the right place at the right time, too.

According to a piece published in the Nov. 22, 2015 edition of the *Erie Times-News*, "Pennsylvania ranks as the nation's top state for craft breweries, producing more than 4 million barrels a year. ... The region's tastes are obviously part of a broader trend that

By: Ryan Smith

Like the Gem City it calls home, much of Erie's burgeoning ultra-local brewpub scene is about duality: a celebration of both the polished and the unpolished sides of things.

Take two of the scene's newest players – Erie Ale Works and Millcreek Brewing Company – for a couple of good examples.

Situated in a former warehouse on business-and-manufacturing-heavy West 12th Street, Erie Ale Works is "no frills ... industrial-alesque," says craft-brewer and co-owner Jeff McCullor.

It's a place where you can come as you are.

And drink some good-and-lovingly-made local beers.

And check out a revolving cast of Erie food truck guests.

And, on some nights, hear some far out live music.

And, if you're feeling it, maybe even draw on the walls.

It's been just about one year since the Ale Works first opened its doors and premiered its distinctive lineup of small-batch brews to the public, and so far "that's been working out pretty well for us," McCullor says, and "we want to keep it that way."

For McCullor and his partner,

brewery vice-president Steve Anthony, that's meant keeping what's so cool about the place – the crafting of its signature beers and its be-what-you-wanna-be kind of vibe – right out front.

That's very Erie indeed. And it makes good sense. It's also good business, and it's what happens when working guys like McCullor and Anthony put a dream (that is, to make and market fine and unique beers without a whole lot of pretense) into practice.

"We often joke that people in Erie grew up drinking beers in their garages," says McCullor.

At Erie Ale Works, with exposed girders, cement flooring, and heavy equipment helping to define its aesthetic, "we've kinda taken that to the next level."

A little over five miles away on West Lake Road, at the more-recently-opened Millcreek Brewing Company, the business is likewise centered around good, lovingly-crafted local brews – and the atmosphere is also easy and inviting. But the hardwood-abundant, soft-lit vibe there leans more toward casual-classy German beer garden than the hip repurposed-industrial hangout feel of the Ale Works.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

has seen sales by craft brewers, which now produce 10.9 percent of all beer sold in the United States, leaving a small handful of giant breweries with a still-commanding, but shrinking share of the market.”

Shrink away, I say.

Honestly, I'm no beer expert. Hell, for the most part, I'm not even a novice these days. But every once in awhile, I do enjoy a good beer. And there's something undeniably cool about not only tasting and smelling, but also really seeing and hearing and touching the sources

of what you're drinking.

Not just pounding pounders of the same old piss-yellow ACME beers. Not hurrying to drink, or do anything else.

At its best – when it's being enjoyed and appreciated responsibly, with a little restraint – the growing micro-

brew-loving culture changes the whole dynamic, the whole old standard of beer drinking. Being someone who's not too into consuming large amounts of alcoholic swill (or anything else), there are a whole lot of reasons I like that.

More and more these days,

we can enjoy and appreciate all kinds of good beers (and good food) that way – and meet the people behind them – at a bunch of really cool places right in our own backyards.

Seems Erie is fast-becoming one of the stars on the map of the country's top-ranking craft-brewing state.

Erie Ale Works is located at 416 W. 12th St. For more information about their beers, their hours, and all the cool stuff that goes on there, call 314.9089, or visit eriealeworks.com.

Millcreek Brewing Company is located at 4102 West Lake Road. To find out more about the establishment and its expansive beer and food menus, call 616.2739, or visit millcreekbrew.com.

Ryan Smith can be reached at rsmith@eriereader.com, and you can follow him on Twitter @ryanmsmithplns.

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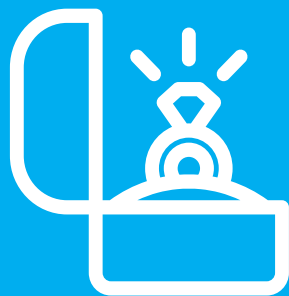
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The Value of a Dollar

Evaluating the impact of local investment by small businesses.

By: Ben Spегgen

There are many routes on the map that charts success for small-business owners. If the options were to be stretched out across a success continuum, at one end might be the prudent planner who studies each step and consults those who've gone before. At the other end, there'd be the daredevil decider, the risk-taker who favors immediacy over restraint.

Examples of both are present in Erie's growing small-business climate. If a common thread connects their tales of success, it's the importance of relationships that help guarantee a brighter future for the entire community through investment and reinvestment.

Correlating the success of small-business owners with the relationships they build may be a study in abstraction – from measuring the firmness of handshakes to calculating exchanged smiles – because they aren't clear benchmarks on the success abacus. But the per-dollar investment and reinvestment are.

According to the U.S. Small Business Association (SBA), which cites studies ranging from Austin, Texas to Grand Rapids, Mich., roughly 68 percent of money spent locally stays local. That two-thirds of every dollar goes toward taxes (which support things like public schools and police), local supplies (paper, eggs, signage, etc.), wages (local employees), local services (accounting, marketing, legal services, etc.), and donations (to wit: direct investment in the community). The remaining one-third of each dollar, which leaves the community, goes toward obtaining supplies they cannot (or choose not to) acquire locally.

In contrast, 57 cents per dollar spent at a non-local business leaves the community. Businesses with weaker ties to a community, cites the SBA, spend significantly more on out-of-town supplies and services, often as a means of keeping overhead low and the bookwork simpler by channeling these streams through other larger corporations and businesses.

What's more, according to the American Independent Business Alliance, which compiled nine studies from the Civic Economics firm in 2012, local re-

circulation of independent businesses' initial local investment of revenue amounts to nearly 50 percent. Non-locally-owned businesses recirculate a paltry 14 percent.

Thus, money spent at locally-owned stores is stickier in the overall economy, fueling it again and again and encouraging more rapid economic growth.

Money spent elsewhere fuels someone else's fire. And we can't warm our hands next to that fire.

And then there's induced impact. The money businesses pay employees will inevitably be spent. Where and how it's spent, however, varies.

If you're noticing a trend, then you correctly deduced that employees of small businesses – based on the fostering of spend-local, buy-local culture – spend more money locally than their big-box counterparts.

Perhaps more significant, though: SBA found that locally-owned businesses donate nearly 250 percent more to local nonprofits and community causes than their big-box competitors. Civic Economics confirms this, reporting that in 2012, more than 7 cents from every locally-spent dollar was reinvested through charitable giving.

But like the intangibles for measuring success, absent from these numbers are the volunteer hours, the donations of venue space and of products, and more – all of which can add up to much more than 7 cents per dollar.

Regardless of their differences, the prudent planner and the daredevil decider are each aware of this. They also know – irrespective of whether they can prove it on paper – that it affects their businesses, because this give-back-to-those-who-support-you model anchors each of their business plans.

Chris Sirianni, President and General Manager of The Brewerrie at Union Station, represents the former. An Erie native, Sirianni has followed a deliberate, linear, and carefully plotted path to small-business success. After graduating from the Indiana University of

Chris Sirianni, President and General Manager of The Brewerrie at Union Station. Opposite: Alice DeGeorge, owner of Presque Isle Printing, flanked by employees Marlee Malpiedi and Michelle Zewe. Both Sirianni and DeGeorge have built their businesses into organizations known for giving back to the community.



BRAD TRIANA



BRAD TRIANA

Pennsylvania in 2000 with a degree in business management, he headed straight back to Erie to launch his career in the craft beer world.

He started with a yearlong internship with Erie Brewing Company, which at the time occupied the space at Union Station that The Brewerrie now calls home. While the craft beer boom was swelling throughout the states, the ripples hadn't quite reached our shores. Sirianni recalls EBC's early distribution model that left a scarcity of locally-brewed beer in Erie. He didn't want to reinvent the wheel; he was just seeking a way to bring it to Erie to help the city move forward more quickly.

Because he wanted to steer the craft beer conversation in Erie, Sirianni, like many prudent planners, met with industry leaders, the torchbearers who had set out ahead of him, so he wouldn't have to blaze his own trail. He spent the next five years developing a business plan, tweaking and fine-tuning it as he amassed experience and observed trends. Along the way, he made a lot of connections and fostered a lot of relationships, which led to the opening of The Brewerrie at Union Station in 2006.

On the other end of that continuum is Alice DeGeorge, owner of Presque Isle Printing. A Quincy, Ill. native, DeGeorge grew up in a family of mechanics and artists, which explains her penchant for graphic design and the free-spirit air about her.

DeGeorge happened upon Erie in a roundabout way. After a start at Quincy University taught her that college wasn't right for her at that moment of her life, she rejoined her family, who

had since relocated in Erie. A self-described worker-bee, DeGeorge says she never envisioned owning her own business, but after a string of various opportunities and experiences – including a decade-long stint as a waitress, work in website design, and several stops at print shops – she decided to start her own hive.

After a degree from Fortis University (then Tri-State) in website design and management with a minor in graphic design, DeGeorge launched Presque

According to the American Independent Business Alliance, which compiled nine studies from the Civic Economics firm in 2012, local recirculation of independent businesses' initial local investment of revenue amounts to nearly 50 percent. Non-locally-owned businesses recirculate a paltry 14 percent.

Isle Printing in 2008. She started her own business the day after she would have lost her job because the printing company she was working for had been acquired by another company.

While DeGeorge's path to small-business ownership was more indirect compared to Sirianni's, they've each found success. DeGeorge has since relocated her business after outgrowing the initial location. In 10 years, Sirianni

has added 20 employees to his roster and, within the last year, off-premise distribution. Each cite relationships and community connectivity as vehicles that drove – and still drive – their own successes.

"When companies get too big, the caring for the customer starts to fade and you just can't rely on them to have your best interest in mind," DeGeorge says. "The money that you spend with us stays in Erie. We are eating out in Erie restaurants, going to local events, and donating to your nonprofit event. I get told a lot, 'Well I can get printing done cheaper with VistaPrint,' and I think, 'Yes – yes, you can. But will they donate to your fundraiser? Will they even come and support your event?'"

For Sirianni, keeping his company community-minded boils down to the Three C Philosophy he has always featured in his employee handbook.

"Craft a better product, from the beer you drink to the food that's on your plate; Care for employees and customers like family; and build Community: give back to those who give to us," he explains, adding that "building that network and building bridges with schools, nonprofits, and charities around town was part of [his business plan] from the get-go."

"I personally volunteer as much as I can with nonprofits and other events around Erie," DeGeorge adds. "I recently co-sponsored a tree at the Festival of Trees with ErieDAWN" (for which she excitedly notes that this organization, which has provided housing and support for homeless women and children since 1995, won third place).

DeGeorge and Sirianni aren't alone in

their give-back, reinvest-in-your-community approach. The Haggertys, who own the Plymouth Tavern, gave DeGeorge her first waitressing gig in Erie – a post she held for a decade. She now designs the menus for the restaurant notorious for its contributions to local charities.

Sirianni credits establishments like Calamari's Squid Row and Jr.'s Last Laugh for paving the way for downtown redevelopment while also giving back to the community – which encouraged him to follow suit. Most recently, Calamari's hosted its yearly free Thanksgiving dinner, open to anyone, while Jr.'s supported the Community Shelter Services' Angel Tree last month that ensured those in need were still able to celebrate the holidays.

"Business is about relationships that you build with another person or another entity," Sirianni says. "That has been a huge part of our success, because it's great to get out there and do great things for the people in your town."

Despite the differences in the prudent planner's and daredevil decider's paths to small-business success, their aim remains similar: Invest in the community you serve and the community you serve will invest in you.

A dollar here and there can add up to big opportunities and great potential. But it's up to the community to unlock that potential by supporting our local businesses.

Ben Spегgen can be contacted at bSpeгgen@ErieReader.com, and you can follow him on Twitter @BenSpeгgen.



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Spotlight on Erie

January 6 to 19, 2016

Saturday, Jan. 9

Sirsy Embraces “Less is More” at Kings Rook Club



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

and blues-rock grit adroitly on their latest offering, 2013's *Coming Into Frame*, produced by the Grammy-winning team of Paul Kolderie and Sean Slade (who have worked with Radiohead, the Pixies, Hole, Dinosaur Jr., the Mighty Mighty Bosstones, etc.). Combine that with their tireless touring schedule (200+ shows a year), Sirsy appears poised for a long-overdue breakthrough.

Opening for them are brothers Andy and Adam Brown of Six Year Stretch with a set of stripped-down alternative/pop-rock. – Matt Swanseger

10 p.m. // Kings Rook Club // 1921 Peach St. // www.sirsy.com // \$10

Thursday, Jan. 14

Tyler Smilo and Matt Texter Tell Their Troubadour Tales at Bobby's Place

If Erie and the surrounding area have a relative surfeit of Rust Belt-hewn solo musicianship, Matt Texter and Tyler Smilo are the picks of the litter.



And now, the two hardworking troubadours will show everyone what they've got, sharing an evening at Bobby's Place.

First up will be Texter, whose earthy grit and growl have long been applauded by local roots music fans.

Then will come Smilo, who (like he always is, it seems) was busy in 2015, and is hitting the ground running in the new year. Along with being a member of heavy-playing Erie bands Potwhole and Daybreak Radio, he found time to write and record another solo effort, *Dust in a Grave*, which made *Reader* music writer Nick Warren's recent "Top Three Albums from Erie Artists in 2015."



Matt Texter, above, and Tyler Smilo, below, will each showcase Rust Belt troubadour-manship at Bobby's Place on Thursday, Jan. 14.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

"Smilo has done it again," wrote Warren. "Dynamic and exhaustive, *Dust* settles behind a personal journey. These appropriately spartan recordings capture the raw quiver of Smilo's acoustic storytelling. ... we find him more adept and finely tuned, cementing himself as a consistent and valuable talent."

Both Smilo's and Texter's talents are a gift to their home city – and worth going out for on a Thursday night. – Ryan Smith

8 to 11 p.m. // 1202 W. 18th St. // facebook.com/BobbysPlace

Thursday, Jan. 14

Piff the Magic Dragon Ready to Slay Audiences



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

adorable long-haired Chihuahua inevitably finds himself in extraordinary peril. But never fear, his friend is a dragon to be trusted. On stage you'll see him having a snack, and making overly dramatic sound effects as he goes from trick to trick. Expect a lot of audience interaction along with all the laughs and illusions.

Magic comes naturally for Piff. He's a magic dragon after all. Always staying deeply in character, John van der Put deftly blends prestidigitation with deadpan comedic delivery.

Piff started out in London, England. The magician gained TV notoriety earlier, appearing on *Penn & Teller: Fool Us*. He went on to tour with Mumford & Sons, and is visible on the cover of *Babel*. Since being on *AGT*, he's had a regular show at the Flamingo in Las Vegas.

He'll bring his show to Erie for four days this January as JR's Last Laugh becomes his lair. The response from the region has been strong, and it's worth noting that the club rarely does Sunday shows. If your post-new-year leaves you a little chilly, let Piff breathe a bit of fire into your weekend. As far as his humor goes, it's a dry heat. – Nick Warren

7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 14; 6:40 and 9:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 15 and Saturday, Jan. 16; 5:30 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 17 // 1402 State St. // jrslastlaugh.net

Thursday, Jan. 14

Laugh/Riot Performing Arts Company Opens 2016 with Killer Joe



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Impatient loan sharks + A penniless drug dealing son + A mother's insurance policy = Ruination assured.

That's the underlying aggregate for

In light of recent events, locals might not be inclined to favor a "downsized approach," much less dance about it. Rock quartet-turned-duo Sirsy may sway the public sentiment, however, when they headline at the Kings Rook Club.

Few bands do more with less than this pair from Albany, N.Y. Despite being stuck behind the drums, singer (and occasional flutist) Melanie Krahmer sacrifices little in the charisma or stage presence departments.

Since streamlining operations in the mid-2000's, Sirsy's Krahmer and Libutti have split bass duties, employing whatever limb or extremity they've not already committed to their primary instruments.

She plays her kit standing up, front-and-center beside the band's other half, guitarist Richard Libutti, as she unleashes her sultry vocals (something akin to Bonnie Raitt, Grace Potter, and Alison Mosshart of The Kills/The Dead Weather). Since streamlining operations in the mid-2000's, Krahmer and Libutti have split bass duties, employing whatever limb or extremity they've not already committed to their primary instruments.

The duo balances pop accessibility

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CALENDAR

Killer Joe, a Southern Gothic play à la Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner set in modern-day Texas, that's as tweaked and twisted as a meth-house mouse.

Laugh/Riot Performing Arts Company, the resident theatre troupe at Edin-

According to Morgan Gore, who portrays Killer Joe: "I think audience reaction will be a mixture of "I don't know how I feel about what I just saw," and "Okay, then ..." and "This is awkwardly entertaining."

boro University, will be performing the Tracy Letts dramedy as their first 2016 presentation.

"There are several really funny moments during *Killer Joe*," said director Rob Connick via email, "but it's important to recognize the difference between dark comedy and traditional comedy." He added: "We don't want to be these characters, we don't want to hang out with these characters, but we can laugh at the situations the characters create for themselves."

Owing money to nefarious sources, Chris, a down-and-out drug dealer, decides to have his mother, Adele,

murdered for her life insurance policy payout. Chris hires Joe, a police detective who moonlights as a hired killer, to perform the matricide. However, since Chris is unable to afford Joe's fee, Joe suggests he temporarily use Chris' simple-minded sister, Dottie, as collateral (as well as a sex partner) until the insurance money is issued. With his father – Adele's ex-husband – and his new wife, Sharla, all involved in these unconscionable cahoots, the deed is done – with unexpected results.

According to Morgan Gore, who portrays Killer Joe: "I think audience reaction will be a mixture of "I don't know how I feel about what I just saw," and "Okay, then ..." and "This is awkwardly entertaining."

7:30 p.m. on Jan. 14-16 & 21-23, 2:30 p.m. on Jan. 17 & 24 // Edinboro University's Diebold Center for the Performing Arts, 219 Meadville St., Edinboro // 323.1147 or laughrioterie.com

Saturday, Jan. 16

The Bocce Winter Classic Derails the Winter Blahs at the Brewerrie

From the rules of the game to the culture surrounding it, few things



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Bocce Winter Classic is a homage to both Erie's droll custom of hosting warm-weather sports tournaments in the bitter cold and the city's rich Italian heritage of which proprietor Chris Sirianni is a part.

emphasize togetherness like the sport of bocce. As the *bocce* (balls) closest to the *boccino* (little ball)/*pallino* (bullet) earn points in competition, the game itself has scored highly with communities that gather around it whenever or wherever it is played – which can be virtually anytime, anywhere.

For example, you might play it at a sun-drenched villa along the Mediterranean shoreline in mid-June, a glass of Limoncello in hand as you roll onto a traditional sand/crushed oyster shell surface (authentic bivalves only, please ... spare me that synthetic rubbish). Or maybe within a cavernous *boccio dromo*, or "bocce dome," the chatter of your *amici* echoing off the canvas as you roll onto a regulation-sized 91-by-13-foot soil and asphalt court.

Or, if you're more adventurous, perhaps in a fenced-in patio beside a set of railroad tracks during the dead of winter?

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the Brewerrie's Bocce Winter Classic at the Trackside Bar. The event is an homage to both Erie's droll custom of hosting warm-weather sports tournaments in the bitter cold (e.g., the Frostbite and Barstool Opens) and the city's rich Italian heritage of which proprietor Chris Sirianni is a part. He has installed three gravel bocce courts on the premises since moving in, thanks to the immense popularity of the Brewerrie Summer League on Monday nights from June through August.

Geographically, the Brewerrie lies on the outskirts of Erie's historic Little Italy neighborhood, which is centered at 16th and Walnut streets, mere blocks away. Prior to World War I, the vast majority of Italian immigrants were concentrated in this area, which had expanded to nine city blocks by 1911. In the intervening century, most of their

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descendants migrated out of Little Italy, generally settling in the upper west side or Millcreek. Nonetheless, strong reminders of its legacy remain. St. Paul's Church, located at 1617 Walnut Street, still puts on the wildly successful Italian Festival each August. Just down the street, at 1518 Walnut Street, you can still find the headquarters of La Nuova Auora Society, 108 years after its establishment. The club features four bocce courts (two indoor, two outdoor under a covered pavilion) and accommodates numerous men's and women's leagues year-round.

Whether you're a statesman (as Caesar Augustus suggested of bocce players in the early A.D.'s) or a scoundrel (as the Catholic Church suggested of bocce players in 1702, when they formally condemned the sport for promoting gambling and prohibited clergymen from partaking altogether), there's no question the game can help you break the ice – socially and, in this case, literally.

Registration forms for the single-elimination tournament are available at the Brewer's website and must be completed before Jan. 11. The registration fee of \$100 per team or \$25 per person covers beer, a lunch buffet, hot chocolate, and coffee.

Block, spock*, and drop it. – Matt Swanseger

*spock (v) – to use one bocce ball to manipulate another and/or the pallino to your benefit

Check-in/lunch: 12 p.m., First roll: 1 p.m. // The Brewer at Union Station, 123 W. 14th St. // thebrewerie.com/upcoming-events

Saturday, Jan. 16

Charity Nuse & The Drive Brings "Philosoulful Country Blues" to the Kings Rook Club

Charity Nuse and Claire Stuczynski care musical powerhouses in their own rights: Both are bold, beyond talented, and highly engaging – the kinds of artists that make quick fans out of most listeners.

To see those two on the same bill, then, would surely be a very good thing. And that's what's happening

"Philosoulful country blues that funks and rolls" is how Charity Nuse & The Drive describes itself.

on Saturday, Jan. 16 at the Kings Rook Club. And, it's a free show for members, to boot.

First off, the talented Stuczynski, a longtime local favorite of solo acoustic fans, will take the stage, warming up

the crowd (and man, she will) for the night's featured performance by Charity Nuse & The Drive.

That's the band in which Nuse (also a long-celebrated talent in the region's live music scene) has been displaying her serious chops since the recent disbanding of area roots-jam masters Big Leg Emma.

"Philosoulful country blues that funks and rolls" is how Charity Nuse & The Drive describes itself.

That sounds like something to get down to, alright. – Ryan Smith

10 p.m. // 1921 Peach St. // facebook.com/kingsrookclub

Sunday, Jan. 17

Tomoreaux Headlines a Shoegaze Showcase at Basement Transmissions

Shoegaze is the name of the game on Sunday, Jan. 17, with local and regional indie bands taking the stage at



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Basement Transmissions.

For those not in the loop, "shoegaze" is a term used to describe certain styles of alternative and indie rock bands, characterized by the heavy use of effects pedals and ambience, which often requires the guitarists to stare down toward their feet for the majority of the band's set.

For those not in the loop, "shoegaze" is a term used to describe certain styles of alternative and indie rock bands, characterized by the heavy use of effects pedals and ambience, which often requires the guitarists to stare down toward their feet for the majority of the band's set.

Tomoreaux, Buffalo's hardest working shoegaze band, is headlining the bill. The three-piece is releasing their latest album *At Peace Overlook* on Jan. 8 and have booked a string of shows over the next two months taking them all over New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and even into Quebec.

Frame and Mantle, The Standby,

and Maddock are the local acts filling out the bill, each offering their own distinct style of what might be considered shoegaze. Frame and Mantle brings their American Football meets new Title Fight sound, The Standby delivers ambient grunge with a subtle pop punk twist, and Maddock adds a groovy edge to express their music.

BT is hosting this show in the back room, which is usually reserved for acoustic shows and hanging out between sets. The setting is much more intimate, and it is sure to complement the style of music being played that night. – Tommy Shannon

6 p.m. // Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11th St. // \$5 // basementtransmissions.com

Sunday, Jan. 17

Crucible, Toothgrinder, and Ghost Key Rock Sunday Hard at Sherlock's



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Crucible, a metalcore band from Detroit, is coming to Erie, with Sherlock's being the last stop on their EP release tour.

Formed five years ago, Crucible started as a side project featuring three members of the popular metalcore band, We Came As Romans. However, it has taken until this year for the band to come to fruition, having just released its first EP in December.

Supporting acts on the tour are New Jersey's Toothgrinder, and Ghost Key from Illinois. Toothgrinder is much more experimental, bordering on a math rock/metal hybrid, while Ghost Key plays a slightly melodic hardcore punk, akin to bands like Defeater and Touché Amore.

Opening acts on the bill are local metal bands Amavasya and Saevitia, both of whom have released new material this year, and who are among the top names in the current Erie metal scene. – Tommy Shannon

5 p.m. // Sherlock's, 508 State St. // All Ages // \$12 Advance, \$15 Day of show

CALENDAR

MUSIC

Jeff Jensen

Jan. 8 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Sprague Farm & Brew Works, 22043 US Hwy 6 & 19 sleepingchainsaw.com.

Friday Night Jazz

Jan. 8, 15 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Oasis Pub, 3122 West Lake Rd. jazzerie.com.

Jackson Station

Jan. 8 — 8 p.m.
Presque Isle Downs & Casino, 8199 Perry Hwy. presqueisledowns.com.

Derek Davis Duo

Jan. 8 — 9:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m.
Peek'n Peak Resort, 1405 Olde Rd. pknpk.com.

Stoned & Beautiful

Jan. 8 — 10 p.m.
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. facebook.com/kingsrookclub.

Touch of Gray

Jan. 9 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Sprague Farm & Brew Works, 22043 US Hwy 6 & 19 sleepingchainsaw.com.

Saturday Night Blues, Latin and More

Jan. 9, 16 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Oasis Pub, 3122 West Lake Rd. jazzerie.com.

The Hamiltons

Jan. 9 — 8 p.m.
Presque Isle Downs & Casino, 8199 Perry Hwy. presqueisledowns.com.

Saloonatics

Jan. 9 — 9:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m.
Peek'n Peak Resort, 1405 Olde Rd. pknpk.com.

Sirsy and Andy & Adam of Six Year Stretch

Jan. 9 — 10 p.m.
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. facebook.com/kingsrookclub.

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Jan. 11 — 6 p.m.
Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11th St. facebook.com/beardedbabyproductions.

Dionisio

Jan. 13 -- 9 p.m. to midnight
Z's Tavern, 3406 Buffalo Rd. facebook.com/Jimmy-Zs-Timeout-Tavern-159535070744093.

James Thompson

Jan. 15 — noon to 1 p.m.
WQLN, 8425 Peach St. wqln.org.

The Highlife

Jan. 15 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Sprague Farm & Brew Works, 22043 US Hwy 6 & 19 sleepingchainsaw.com.

Chris Higbee

Jan. 15 — 8 p.m.
Presque Isle Downs & Casino, 8199 Perry Hwy. presqueisledowns.com.

Steve Strickland Duo

Jan. 15 — 9:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m.

Peek'n Peak Resort, 1405 Olde Rd. pknpk.com.

Qwister

Jan. 15 — 10 p.m.
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. facebook.com/kingsrookclub.

Wagner and Winston

Jan. 16 — 1 to 4 p.m.
Arundel Cellars, 11727 E. Main Rd. arundelcellars.com.

Bus 17

Jan. 16 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Sprague Farm & Brew Works, 22043 US Hwy 6 & 19 sleepingchainsaw.com.

Adaptations and Adorations

Jan. 16 — 7:30 p.m.
Cathedral Prep. Auditorium, 250 W. 10th St. gannon.edu.

Music at the Mansion honoring Basil Ronzitti

Jan. 16 — 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Woman's Club of Erie, 259 W. 6th St. jazzerie.com

Highway 45

Jan. 16 — 9:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m.
Peek'n Peak Resort, 1405 Olde Rd. pknpk.com.

Charity Nuse & The Drive and Claire Stuczynski

Jan. 16 — 10 p.m.
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. facebook.com/kingsrookclub.

Crucible, Toothgrinder, Ghost Key

Jan. 17 — 5 to 10 p.m.
Sherlocks, 508 State St. facebook.com/sherlocksparkplace.

Tomoreaux, Frame & Mantle, Maddock and The Standby

Jan. 17 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11th St. facebook.com/basement.transmissions.

Acoustic Gypsies

Jan. 17 — 9:30 p.m.

to 1:30 a.m.
Peek'n Peak Resort, 1405 Olde Rd. pknpk.com.

Hinder with Shaman's Harvest & Within Reason

Jan. 18 — 6 p.m. to midnight
Sherlocks, 508 State St. facebook.com/sherlocksparkplace.

DANCE

90's Video Dance Party

Jan. 16 — 7 to 10 p.m.
McCoy's Barrelhouse and Grill, 1013 State St. facebook.com/mccoysbarrelhouse.

FOOD & DRINK

Sips, Suds & Songs

Jan. 8, 22, 29 -- 8 to 11 p.m.
The Cork 1794, 17 W. Main St. cork1794.com.

Mug Club Party 2016

Jan. 10 — 1 to 5 p.m.
The Brewerrie at Union Station, 123 W. 14th St. brewerrie.com.



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Care. Compassion. Community.

The Erie Vegan and Vegetarian Society Screens *Fed Up* at the



Whole Foods Co-op

Know what 17 teaspoons of sugar looks like?

If you answered "No," you are probably with most of the rest of America. The simple answer: It looks like a 20-ounce bottle of soda.

A single soda nearly triples the American Heart Association's (AHA) recommended daily allowance for added sugar for women (the AHA allows only six added teaspoons of sugar per day for women and nine for men).

In his 2012 *Huffington Post* article "Sugar Babies: The Rise of 'Adult Onset' Diabetes in Children," Mark Hyman, MD, writes that over a 15-year

period, adult-onset (or Type 2) diabetes rose from three to 50 percent in children. During that same time period, Hyman's colleagues witnessed strokes and cirrhosis from fatty liver disease in children as young as five. Hyman attributes each of these conditions to diet.

"We have to do something about this," Katie Couric stated in a 2014 *Good Morning America* interview while describing her decision to co-produce and narrate her documentary film *Fed Up*. "This generation of children is expected to live shorter life spans than their parents," Couric continued. "It's incredibly alarming."

The Erie Vegan and Vegetarian Society, with the goal of educating the Erie area about the benefits of consuming a plant-based, whole foods diet, is sponsoring a viewing of *Fed Up* on Jan. 10 at 1 p.m. at the Whole Foods Co-op.

"The documentary is an eye-opener about how much sugar we take in on a daily basis," Lisa Casler, co-founder of the Erie Veg Society, said via phone. "The film does a nice job of detailing the lives of three children as we experience their struggles to switch from primarily sugar-based diets." — Ti Sumner

Jan. 10 // 1 p.m. // Whole Foods Co-op, 1341 W. 26th St. // Free and open to the public // For more information, contact Lisa or Craig Casler at 746.6381.

All Hands on Deck: The Niagara's free winter sail training program begins Jan. 9.

If one of your New Year's resolutions is to try something outside of your comfort zone, this just might be the thing.

Starting Jan. 9, the Niagara League is conducting free weekly workshops to teach interested people the skills necessary to sail the U.S. Brig Niagara. They will be held on Saturday mornings until April 30, when newly-minted sailors will take their skills out onto the water in the ship's seasonal shake-down sail.

Classes will cover Niagara and regional maritime history, line handling, tool use, knots, rigging, and a host of other skills necessary to keep the Niagara safe and in one piece. When training is completed, participants then have the opportunity to become Niagara volunteers. By helping with ship maintenance, volunteers earn credit toward sailing with the ship in the summer. Not a bad payoff.

According to Christopher Cusson, Second Mate and Ship Volunteer Coordinator, the training program has been taking place since the first sailing season in 1991. "The ship's First Mate David Goldman will be the lead instructor for the program with the assistance of our winter crew and myself. Current volunteers will be partic-

ipating to help in teaching those who are new to the skills." Training is open to those 14 years and older, with those under 16 needing the accompaniment of an adult.

Classes will be held on Jan. 9, 16, and 23; Feb. 6 and 20; March 5 and 19; and April 2, 16, and 23. The program is open-enrollment, meaning you don't have to participate in every class.

"This is a unique opportunity for the residents of this region to sail on their tall ship."

The Niagara needs volunteers to help sail, says Cusson. "Our volunteers are the backbone of our organization and we are grateful for the hard work and passion they share year round. This is a unique opportunity for the residents of this region to sail on their tall ship. Very few communities have such an exceptional ship and we hope to share it with as many as possible."

— Mary Birdsong

Sound like fun or a stimulating challenge? Contact the League via email at volunteer@flagshipniagara.org or call 452.2744.

Bare the Barrels

Jan. 15, 16, 17, 18
Various Locations,
lakeeriewinecountry.org.

38th Annual Pro-Life Breakfast

Jan. 16 — 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Erie Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier
peopleforlife.org.

Bocce Winter Classic

Jan. 16 — noon
The Brewerrie at Union Station, 123 W. 14th St.
brewerrie.com.

Frozen

Jan. 16 — 1 to 5 p.m.
The Grape Discovery Center, 8305 W. Main Rd.
lakeeriewinecountry.org.

FILM

D-Day: Normandy 1944 Movie

Ongoing through Feb. 1 —

11 a.m. & 1 p.m. & 3 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Drive.
trecpi.org.

Deepsea Challenge

Ongoing through Feb. 1 — noon
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Drive.
trecpi.org.

Tiny Giants

Ongoing through Feb. 1 — 2 p.m. & 5 p.m.
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Drive.
trecpi.org.

Bolshoi Ballet - Giselle

Jan. 9 — 12:55 p.m.
Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St.
mercyhurst.edu.

Nature Cat

Jan. 9 — 1 to 3 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St.
erielibrary.org.

Fed Up

Jan. 10 — 1 to 4 p.m.
Whole Foods Co-op, 1341 W. 26th St.
theerievegsociety.org.

Maypole Traditions of Bavaria

Jan. 14 — 7 p.m.
Erie Maennerchor Club, 1607 State St.
gcsoe.org.

Double Feature: The Ape (1940) and the Ape Man (1943)

Jan. 15 — 8 p.m.
Erie Movie House, 3424 Westlake Rd.
facebook.com/ErieMovieHouse.

MET Opera - Les Pêcheurs De Perles (Bizet)

Jan. 16 — 12:55 p.m.
Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St.
mercyhurst.edu.

The Meaning of

Life (1983) Monty Python Comedy

Jan. 16 — 8 p.m.
Erie Movie House, 3424 Westlake Rd.
facebook.com/ErieMovieHouse.

VISUAL ARTS

Ian Brill: Storm

Ongoing through Jan. 10
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St.
erieartmuseum.org.

Connect: Grassroots Efforts to Reshape Our Community

Ongoing through Jan. 10
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St.
erieartsandculture.org.

Land, Sea and Sky: Details from Nature

Ongoing through Jan. 23
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St.
erieartmuseum.org.

Assembled Visions

Ongoing through Mar. 26
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St.
erieartmuseum.org.

Art of the Comic Book

Ongoing through May. 29
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St.
erieartmuseum.org.

Rob Katkowski

Jan. 8 through Feb. 2 (Reception Jan. 10 — 2 to 4 p.m.)
Glass Growers Gallery, 10 E. 5th St.
glassgrowersgallery.com.

Second Sundays

Jan. 10 — 2 to 4 p.m.
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St.
erieartmuseum.org.

Colorama

Jan. 11 through Feb. 7 — 9 a.m. (Reception Jan. 14 — 5 to 7 p.m.)
Cummings Gallery, 501 E. 38th St.
mercyhurst.edu.

THEATRE

Killer Joe

Jan. 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23 — 7:30 p.m. & Jan. 17, 24 — 2:30 p.m.
Edinboro University's Deibold Center for Performing Arts, 219 Meadville St.
laughrioterie.com.

The Snow Queen

Jan. 15, 16, 22, 23 — 7 p.m. & Jan. 16, 17, 23, 24 — 2 p.m.
Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10 St.
erieplayhouse.org.

COMMUNITY/VARIETY

Widget Wednesday 2016 Kick Off Festival

Jan. 6 — 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Millcreek mall, 5800 Peach St.
millcreekmall.net.

Disney on Ice Presents Dare to Dream

Jan. 6, 7, 8, 9 — 7 to 9:30 p.m.

Kings Rook Club

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STREET MACHINE [FREE]

FRI 01/29
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Baroness
Purple
Abraxan Hymns



Burning and cathartic, *Purple* is one of the best metal albums of the year. This triumphant return for the Savannah, Ga. band comes



in the wake of a horrific accident. In 2012, the band's bus fell 30 feet from a viaduct in Bath, England. Suffering from fractured vertebrae, bassist Matt Maggioni and drummer Allen Blickle left the band the next year. The new lineup now features the rhythm section of experimental post-rock band Trans Am. The changes are perceptible, but the spirit and tone of the band remain true. Fans are quick to point out that the record is aptly named, its sound lying somewhere between *The Red Album* and 2009's *Blue Record*. The guitar riffs are tight and exacting, and the album is more brightly produced than its predecessors. Sections are operatic and sweeping, while never drifting into noodly fantasy affectation. Both credible and accessible, Baroness is an excellent cross-over band for laypeople and metalheads alike. You can pick out every word of John Baizley's gruff vocals while the band builds an artfully heavy masterpiece. – Nick Warren

Cage the Elephant
Tell Me I'm Pretty
RCA



Cage the Elephant is a perfectly fine band. *Tell Me I'm Pretty* has some catchy hooks, and great timbre.



This album is full of songs you might hear at a decent clothing store, or in the background of a *really cool* insurance commercial. They might cause you to check out the album, and you'll probably breeze all the way through it. Take a cut like "That's Right," or "Mess Around," put it on a party playlist, and it'll get nods of approval. They're genuinely good-sounding songs, it's just hard to get excited about this album as a whole. It feels hollow. The Kentucky band is adept at crafting the modern sound of radio-friendly garage rock. The record is produced by the Black Keys' Dan Auerbach, and shares the familiar fuzzy retro crunch of the wildly popular duo. Fans of 2013's *Melophobia* won't be let down, although that release felt a little more genuine. In the end, the plea of the title really works. The superficial appeal of every track succumbs to the overall insecurity of an album that never quite clicks. – Nick Warren

GNOSIS
Silver Matter
Independent



Erie's own GNOSIS is one of the best jam bands in the region. *Silver Matter* is a sonic treat from start to finish. I've been



gathering my favorite instrumental albums and playing them when I really need to concentrate. This was added within seconds. Putting on the headphones, I was able to actually *accomplish* things to this music. In much the same way, live, you see the entire crowd becoming energized. It's complex enough to stimulate the brain and get the juices flowing, without the distractions of misguided, half-hearted lyrics. It doesn't meander like some of the more negative examples cited when people use the phrase "jam band" in the pejorative sense. The compositions have their destinations in sight; the band just enjoys taking the scenic route. This recording is perfectly transparent. Pat Scutella's guitar tone bleeds into Troy Evans' keyboards at times for a beautiful back-and-forth. Songs are dynamic and varied, some even having a sense of humor like "GeoMush." It's psychedelic, space-age fusion that's brethren with El Ten Eleven as much as it is with Lotus. – Nick Warren

Kurt Cobain
Montage of Heck – The Home Recordings
Universal Music



I finally understand why a certain segment of our population still obsesses over Kurt Cobain: He was genuine. It's usually the



silent troubled outcasts and angry antisocial stoners who say "I hate fakers." But I've always thought, "Hey, everybody pretends to be who they aren't." But not Cobain. He had no secrets. Cobain put it all out there – every blemish, every trouble, every silly, stupid, or brilliant idea that popped into his head. And *Montage of Heck* documents it all. Listening to this selection of recordings and watching the documentary by the same title, you experience the brilliant and troubled life of one of the most influential and paradoxical figures in the last 20 years of pop culture. Parts of *Montage*, like "The Yodel Song," are unquestionably revelatory, as Cobain's creative process is put on display. But much of this album is clumsily painful to hear; "Beans" being one example. Likely recorded with equipment Cobain was unfamiliar with while under the influence of various narcotics, experimental absurdity like this, genuine or not, is best left hidden. – Bryan Toy

& Jan. 9 — 11 a.m. & 3 p.m.
& Jan. 10 — 1 p.m. & 5 p.m.
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

Outside the Window - Turtles

Jan. 7 — 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov.

Beginner Tech Radio Class

Jan. 7 — 6 to 8 p.m.
American Red Cross Building, 4961 Pittsburgh Ave. w3gv.org.

Justice for Immigrants Vigil

Jan. 8 — 12:15 to 12:45 p.m.
Federal Building, 6th and State St. eriebfp.org.

April Macie

Jan. 8, 9 — 6:40 p.m.

& 9:30 p.m.
Jr.'s Last Laugh, 402 State St. jrslastlaugh.net.

Free Winter Sail Training Program

Jan. 9 — 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Erie Maritime Museum, 150 E. Front St. flagshipniagara.org.

Erie March for Life

Jan. 9 — 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Perry Square, Erie PA peopleforlife.org.

Winter Trails Day

Jan. 9 — 1 to 3 p.m.
Lighthouse Parking Lot, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov.

Snowshoe Saturdays

Jan. 9, 16, 30 — 1:30 to 3 p.m.
Asbury Woods Nature Center, 4105 Asbury Rd. asburywoods.org.

All Washed Up

Jan. 13 — 6:30 to 8 p.m.
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov.

Erie BayHawks vs. Ft. Wayne

Jan. 13 — 7 to 10 p.m.
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

Winter Stroll in the Park

Jan. 14 — 10 a.m. to noon
North Pier Parking Area, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov.

Erie Otters vs. Barrie

Jan. 14 — 7 to 9:30 p.m.
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

Piff the Magic Dragon

Jan. 14 — 7 p.m. & Jan. 15, 16 — 6:40 p.m. & 9:30 p.m.

& Jan. 17 — 5:30 p.m.
Jr.'s Last Laugh, 402 State St. jrslastlaugh.net.

Stars & Stripes Gymnastics Invitational

Jan. 15, 16, 17, 18
Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier erieevents.com.

Drum and Chant Workshop

Jan. 15 -- 7 to 9 p.m.
St. Marks Episcopal Church, 4701 Old French Rd. eventbrite.com.

Erie BayHawks vs. Westchester

Jan. 15 — 7 to 10 p.m.
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

Winterfest 2016

Jan. 16

Peek'n Peak Resort, 1405 Olde Rd. pknpk.com.

Turtle Talk

Jan. 16 — 11 a.m. to noon
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov.

Reading Buddies with the Erie Playhouse

Jan. 16 -- 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. unitedwayerie.org.

Erie BayHawks vs. Delaware

Jan. 16 — 7 to 10 p.m.
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

JazzErie Members Party

Jan. 16 -- 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Woman's Club of Erie, 259 W. 6th St. jazzerie.com.

Erie BayHawks vs. Canton

Jan. 18 — 2 to 5 p.m.
Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

Wintertime at the Maritime

Jan. 19 — 6 to 10 p.m.
Erie Maritime Museum, 150 E. Front St. flagshipniagara.org.

Presque Isle History Week: Presque Isle Lighthouse

Jan. 19 — 7 to 8:30 p.m.
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov.

Presque Isle History Week: Life of a Sailor

Jan. 20 — 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov.

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| April 1-2, PA Junior Wrestling Championships | Erie Insurance Arena |
| June 16-19, VNEA World Junior Pool Championships | Bayfront Convention Center |
| August 13, The Color Run | Downtown Erie |
| September 10, Barber Beast on the Bay | Presque Isle State Park |



For more information on these and other events, visit www.eriesportscommission.com

Transcendent Riches

Experience four artists' fruitful journeys in "Assembled Visions" at the Erie Art Museum.

By: Mary Birdsong

Source material for an artist – whether it be language, form and space, the human condition, or philosophy – is always endless and rich with possibilities. And even the most inconsequential object or idea can set an artist down a fruitful path.

Assembled Visions, on display now through March 26 at the Erie Art Museum, takes us down diverse and productive paths into the creative lives of Shelle Barron, Geoffrey Beadle, Terry McKelvey, and Fred Scruton, all artists and professors in Edinboro University's art department. The show uncovers some of the seeds from which their visions grow and, in a video loop in the gallery, the artists generously share the thoughts and techniques behind their working processes.

Beadle's universe starts and nearly ends in his studio, which is not a critical observation. His exploration of space and the intimacy of family take place there. The most formal of his colleagues here, his work is linear, his figures solid. He says in the video that he does long studies of a scene prior to the final composition. It shows. His mastery of charcoals and pastels is appar-

ent in the drape of clothing, fine wisps of hair, and the folds of skin. In "Thirty-Six Weeks," a very pregnant woman stands in profile looking down. Soft shadows define her swollen abdomen and jutting collarbone; sharp lines delineate the creases of her neck and arm. The play of light on her body is direct, but yields softness despite its crisp linearity. As a result, Beadle has captured the tenderness and anticipation of what appears to be a singular moment.

But Beadle does turn traditional composition on its head in some works by approaching his subject from atypical points of view. In "Studio #5: Interaction #2" (an oil this time) we see from above the artist before an empty canvas, his seated model with her upper body draped over a table in the foreground and her reflection in a mirror behind Beadle (or is the image an earlier study?). He is bringing the viewer into the act of creating, making the meticulous process he goes through part of the final work.

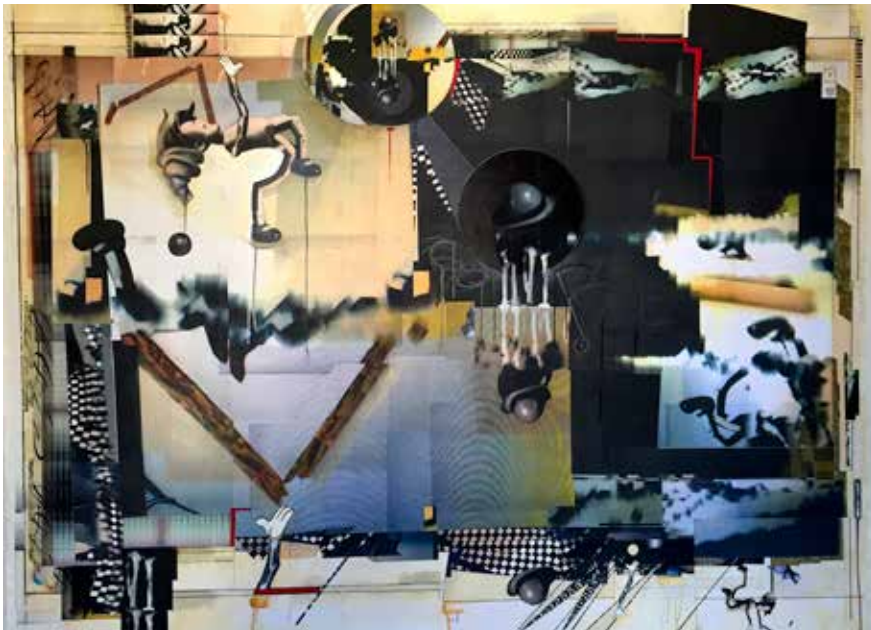
Assembled Visions takes us down diverse and productive paths into the creative lives of Shelle Barron, Geoffrey Beadle, Terry McKelvey, and Fred Scruton, all artists and professors in Edinboro University's art department.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



ARTS & CULTURE



McKelvey also stays close to his studio when it comes to subject matter. Ordinary household objects and the human figure populate the majority of his work. What he is trying to express, however, reaches far beyond the studio. In technique, McKelvey enjoys observing spatial relationships and exploring dynamic tensions between space and form. He utilizes that friction to heighten the ambiguity of subject matter. He chooses allegories, parables, and references to the artworks of past eras, making everyday objects more enigmatic and uncertain.

In "Vermont from Oxford," the window frame, tree trunk, and architecture blur together into a gauzy single plane, reflecting the buzzy warmth of a summer afternoon on a quiet residential street. In "Elegy," however, the lines of the bricks, lattice, and blue jeans on the clothesline are crisply linear. The man leaning over his shovel is whole. There is clearly defined space between objects. Of course, realism does not translate into readily understandable meaning. The man is digging a grave-like hole, an unsmiling woman stands with arms folded just inside the screen door, and the backyard is tidy. That well-defined space is heavy with portent.

Barron's world is neither indoors nor out, it's a private internal one: a universe of rich vocabulary, where words become totems and objects become symbols. And it's nearly impossible to speak of a single work in this show as an individual piece as Barron's narrative and image-words flow throughout these assembled media collages making a complex whole.

Barron's approach is both literary and image-driven at the same time, with little distinction between the two. It is clear when she quotes Lewis Carroll in her statement – "For first you write a sentence, and then you chop it small; Then mix the bits and sort them out ... Just as they chance to fall: The order of the phrases makes no difference at all." – that words and images are easily interchangeable. They are fluid; each stands for the other.

Birds, ladders, wheels, hats, Pinocchio, ribbons, spirals, single words, pages of books, and drips are layered densely across these works. A flat plane of images gives way to a seemingly deep sense of color space. The eye and the mind go back and forth to realize the full compositions. Does the ladder there and there or there all have the same meaning? What exactly does the hat symbolize?

These works reflect the chaos and fast pace of our modern world and Barron's self-proclaimed "overactive habits of mind." References to technology make appearances in works titled "Last Version Saved," "Volume: Mute," and with the ubiquitous red YouTube icon in the very center of "No Damn Cat, No Damn Cradle."

Scruton's work is as straightforward as Barron's (or McKelvey's) is obscure. His photographs do operate on many levels but his cleared-eyed mission to document the self-taught "outsider" artists of our world gives these highly saturated color images a persistent singularity. When he photographs "Prophet Isaiah Robertson; Niagara Falls, NY 2014," Scruton surrounds his subject in Robert- **[Cont. on page 35]**



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Fitness Across a Generation

A family tradition to emulate



Matt (Left) and Anthony (Right) Pribonic attribute their health and fitness-oriented practices to the influence of their mother, Carol Taylor.

By: **Ti Sumner**

It was a salt 'n vinegar kind of day as I stood in the Wegmans produce department, dreaming of the bags of salty sourness just a few aisles away. Attempting to equate the image of the blue and white chip bag with the one of my ever-widening thighs, I selected a mildly firm avocado one day from full ripeness. I looked up to see a 50-something woman with the body of a 20-something fitness instructor in black stretch pants and jacket, cart overflowing with all things leafy and green. It was Carol Taylor, a woman who greatly influenced my training in the health and fitness industry, arriving just in time to save me from my great chip pursuit.

We talked about Carol's sons, Anthony and Matt Pribonic, their purchase and transformation of the old Nautilus building into Fitness U, and

their iRock group personal training business that had, after a few short years, proven its viability and worth in the fitness industry. It was about 20 years ago when I first worked for Carol at the Nautilus Fitness and Racquet Club.

"Stop by," Carol said, in reference to the renovated Fitness U building and new iRock home. "We changed everything."

How much can a 60,000 square foot, sprawling amalgamation of concrete blocks change? In mid-December, I parked my car in the north lot at 2312 West 15th Street and entered the Fitness U building via the old racquetball doors to discover for myself how far two men, a vision, and a commitment to fitness can go in just over five years. As a non-nostalgic person, I did not expect contemporary grey walls and gutted racquetball courts to affect me, but only

the concrete building frame and the solid glass front remained of the courts where I had once spent hundreds of hours practicing kill shots.

Carol, who watched my reactions as I visually absorbed the transformation, pointed to the glass wall and said, "This room is for the Junior Fitness program Anthony plans to grow in 2016. It's really just starting now."

A worthy conversion, indeed.

According to the Erie County Department of Health's 2015 Community Health Needs Assessment, the number of overweight K-12 students in Erie County during the 2012-2013 school year stood at 36 percent, representing fully double the percentage of overweight students in 2011-2012. In his article "Obesity in Children" on Medscape.com, Steven M. Schwarz, M.D., professor of pediatrics at the State University of New York Downstate Medical Cen-

ter, writes that nearly one in four children under 19 in the U.S. is overweight, placing Erie youth well above the national average. The reasons for these statistics are multifactorial, including such measures as environment, lifestyle, and genetics, with more than 90 percent of cases attributed to modifiable habits.

In other words, Junior Fitness programs such as Anthony's could directly impact the level of wellness among local youth and help to reverse the rising statistical trend.

Carol showed me the iRock group fitness room for adults and the room reserved for individual personal training. All three rooms contained similar workout equipment: exercise balls, stationary bikes, kettle ball hand weights, and some type of black and yellow straps hanging from a bar suspended about nine feet in the air. We then returned to the lobby area where Anthony and Matt sat waiting.

A tall, attractive man with a deep voice and neatly-cut brown hair, Anthony – a *Reader* 40 Under 40 honoree – quickly dispels any potential intimidation factor with his sincere commitment to improving the wellness of his members. "Our goal with these classes is to provide a really cool work-out," he said. "We like it when people come in from work, are really tired, and leave happy."

The brothers attribute their health and fitness-oriented practices to their mother's influence while growing up.

"When I was a teenager, I didn't feel good," Carol said. "I thought it might be a lifestyle thing. This happened during

the running craze of the 90's and I started to run and started getting into health food, but I wanted to learn more. So I moved to south Florida for the lifestyle and that's where I really got into fitness and running and eating healthy, and when I moved back to Erie, I kept that going. When the boys were little, I just kept exposing them to that kind of lifestyle and I think they liked it."

Matt said, "Fitness was how my mom was known, and in school, we were the active kids. We were the ones who would never sit down, but we were just modeling ourselves after what we saw at home,

Anthony and Matt Pribonic created change within the fitness world with a vision derived from watching their mother's commitment to wellness over the decades. They witnessed something that made sense and they emulated it.

which was activity."

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) support the boys' beliefs that their mother's healthy habits impacted their own wellness states. Studies have shown that overweight preschoolers are more likely to stay that way during every stage of development, making early health and fitness interventions important. According to NIH studies, kids are likely to imitate their parents' actions. When parents get involved in their children's activity levels, children are not only more likely to lose weight but also are more likely to keep the weight off.

"Mom always encouraged



BRAD TRIANA

us to be active," Matt continued. "She never said 'Settle down,' or 'Don't run around the house,' or 'Don't get dirty.' It was always, 'Do it. Do it now, run around, wear yourself out, go crazy.' It was awesome."

Growing up in an active household may have, to Anthony and Matt, felt like a natural starting point to owning a gym relying on an untested, unproven, dramatically new form of group personal training, but the transition did not seem so natural to Carol.

"It was during the recession, and Anthony called and said, 'I'm switching my major from pre-med to business, quitting baseball, and opening a gym,'" Carol said, rolling her eyes and laughing at the absurdity of the phone conversation. "I was just getting out of the fitness industry and he was going into it. With the recession, I thought there was no future in fitness."

"My dream was to run a gym and have my chiropractor office be part of my club," Anthony explained. "But in 2009, when I was a junior at Gannon, my mom got me a job running the Family First Fitness Center."

With no budget for equipment, Anthony tried for weeks to improve programming and

personal training services. Eventually, he called his brother, Matt, a personal trainer in Fort Lauderdale, and asked him to return home to help build a better club.

"We used medicine balls and big tires for personal training," Anthony said. "But we started to see a bigger need for group fitness. Everyone who signed up for the gym up there kept asking about group classes."

About that same time, Anthony came across the TRX Suspension Trainer: straps invented by an ex-Navy SEAL intended for full-body workouts. These were the black and yellow straps I had seen hanging in each iRock fitness room.

After purchasing one to use with a personal training client, Anthony came up with the idea to use the straps for group fitness classes. Matt, who possesses the larger, more muscular physique of the two brothers, did not believe a piece of material resembling a Jeep tow-strap could impact a workout significantly enough to become the focus of group personal training.

"I put him through a fifteen minute work-out," Anthony said. "A very basic work-out. And I just buried him. Then Matt said, 'Let's do it.'"

"Anthony's the visionary,

Matt's the guy who goes out and makes it happen," Carol said. "Anthony and I kind of sit in back and plan, while Matt's up front talking to people and getting everything going."

In the adult group training room behind us, music started for the next iRock class. It was loud. Very loud. It was the thump-thump-thump our parents always told us to turn down as kids.

Matt called Neal Devlin, a local attorney and iRock member, over to the table. Devlin said his membership began with a Father's Day gift card from his wife and grew into memberships for his sons, also.

"It's just a really fun atmosphere that we all look forward to coming to," Devlin said. "For one hour a day, we get to turn off everything else and do it. Now I bring my two older boys to the youth fitness class and they love it. For my middle son, who is not as into sports, the classes provide a really good fitness outlet for him."

In their "Fit in 50 Years" study published in *BMC Public Health*, Simone Dohle and Brian Wansink showed that kids who exercise regularly during their youth are more likely to stay fit throughout adulthood.

Leyla Dombrowski, a 2015 Mercyhurst University grad-

uate and member of the Mercyhurst women's national runner-up rowing team, participates in iRock classes because she wanted to do something that made her feel as good as she did when she rowed. For Dombrowski, joining a gym was an important way for her to continue being an athlete in a different way.

"It makes me so happy to feel fit," Dombrowski said, pausing at the table on her way into class. "It gives me more confidence than anything else. To be able to come to the gym before work, I'm already in a good mood. My managers at work always ask me if I'm tired when I get there, but I say, 'No, I'm more awake than I would be if I didn't work out.'"

As the music thumped behind us, Matt and Anthony Pribonic left for appointments while Devlin and Dombrowski ran into class. Carol and I talked about the path that led her and her boys to this point.

"I thought I had burned out in the fitness industry just as Anthony and Matt started into it. Now, they're doing their visionary and marketing things, they're both fit and happy, and I get to see my boys and my granddaughter every day," Car-

ol said, referring to Anthony's 6-month-old daughter who visits the club's daycare daily.

If history continues to repeat itself in this family, as studies have shown that it will, then there's a good chance Carol's granddaughter will visit her daddy's club for many years to come. Perhaps Devlin's kids' kids will follow the family fitness tradition in sports or gym activities. The Pribonic boys will become the norm rather than the exception and the next ECDH Community Health Needs Assessment will show an upward trend in local youth fitness.

Maybe all that will happen, but it won't happen by doing nothing. Anthony and Matt created change within the fitness world with a vision derived from watching their mother's commitment to wellness over the decades. They witnessed something that made sense and they emulated it.

Now it's time for others to do the same. Let's reverse the epidemic of unhealthy weight. Let's make Erie the wellness example to follow, not the one to avoid.

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[Cont. from page 33] son's own work emphasizing that artist's individual presence.

Looking at Scruton's collection here, a casual observer may be tempted to solely focus on the work and personalities of the artists he chooses to document. But that would be a mistake, as Scruton's own mastery should not be overlooked. In "Joe Minter; Birmingham, Al, 2013," Scruton places his subject within the artist's work, framing Minter with gritty rusted metal, chains, and boots. His hands clench the poles, signifying Minter's full immersion in what he makes. Minter's eyes peer out from under the curl of his red knit hat,

staring off past the gaze of the lens, suggesting vision beyond the earthly plane.

In one way or another, the four artists here transcend the earthly plane as well, and it's deeply satisfying to spend time with the works of artists who are abundantly mature in vision and technique. One senses their hands steady on the wheel, their eyes clearly surveying the ground for the next seeds of inspiration along their fruitful paths.

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