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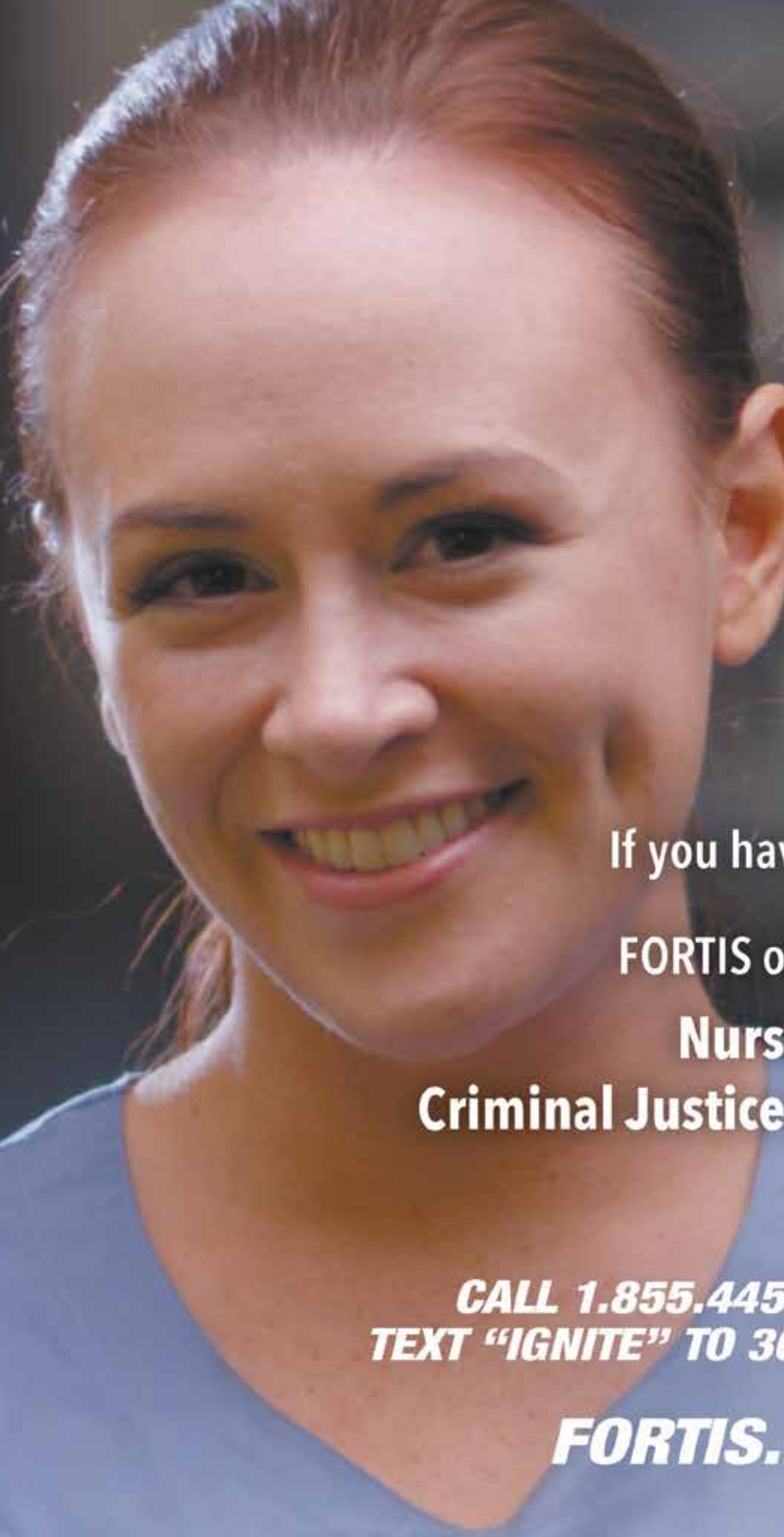
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The Erie Reader is the local voice for news, arts, and culture, and is Erie's only independent, alternative newspaper. Founded in 2010, the Reader has quickly become the region's award-winning source for arts coverage, a strong cultural compass, and 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 sales inquiries to 814.314.9364. For editorial inquiries, email contact@ErieReader.com.



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From the Editors

Finding gratitude in a thankless time

The holiday season is officially upon us. Ruled by the massive sprawl of Christmas, the season is bookended by two days that offer a time of reflection. New Year's Eve and Thanksgiving both let us look back on the year's events. And my, oh my, what a year it's been!

For some, it might seem naive to list what we're thankful for this year. To certain people, 2016 has been quite the *thankless* year. But amidst the fear, the violence, and all the heightened emotions, it's not impossible to find silver linings. Daniel Doubet of Keystone Progress penned an op-ed expressing his anger in the wake of the presidential election. Setbacks and defeats can become rallying cries, engaging new voices in our political conversation. Things are far from over, and no matter what your political affiliation, *we're still standing*.

Things are being built. New businesses are opening up and finding success all the time. Just look at RJ and Jamie Messenger's Iron Empire Clothing, which has recently upgraded to a larger storefront downtown. Ed Bernik talked to them about how their business continues to grow and thrive. Last year, they were awarded the People's Choice Award at Disrupt Erie, which hosted its second annual awards on Nov. 16. Congratulations to Tom Laird of Expivia, Erin Green of Verify Systems, Fred Williams of Climate Changers Inc., Jennifer and Terri Reed of Relish Studio & Gallery, and Joe Prischak of the Plastek Group on their wins this year.

There are things in the works, plans being made. Ben Speggen takes a closer look at a section of our city that demands revitalization. Talking with local politicians Jay Breneman and David Brennan, Speggen outlines the history and future of an area of 19th Street referred to as the Eastside Opportunity Corridor.

New members of our community are being welcomed. Our city's thriving refugee population is finding its voice, becoming a pivotal part of Erie's story. Jim Wertz tells the story of one particular Iraqi refugee, Maitham Basha-Agha. Maitham shines a positive light toward whomever he meets, and we're immensely excited to be working with him at the *Reader*.

This issue is hitting the stands during another type of homecoming. People from across the county are filing in and flying in to Erie to be with their families. From college students to thirty-somethings and beyond, it's time to come back, even for a brief time.

The day before Thanksgiving – known to some by the cringeworthy moniker of “Blackout Wednesday” (or simply “Black Wednesday”) – is a relatively new phenomenon, and one of the biggest drinking nights of the year. First of all, listen to your mother: Be safe! But as you enjoy your turkey-eve responsibly, take the opportunity to reconnect with friends you rarely see all year. Familiar faces pop in, often asking, “So, how is Erie doing?”

We sincerely hope the answer is, “Better.”

Erie At Large

When a refugee calls Erie home



Maitham Basha-Agha (center) taking a selfie with children in Botswana in January, 2016 while serving in the Peace Corps.

By: Jim Wertz

Erie is often referred to as “The Gem City” because of its proximity to Lake Erie on sunny summer days. But if the national and international press has anything to say about it – and they do – our fair city will henceforth be referred to as “Erie, Pennsylvania: An International City.”

It started when James and Deborah Fallows came to Erie as part of the “City Makers: American Futures” project that the couple produces for *The Atlantic*. Both Fallows are institutions within that venerable publication, with professional resumes that far exceed the word count I’m provided here. Nevertheless, when they have something to say, the world listens.

Among the various topics

they’ve covered in the Erie series was our city’s large and growing population of New Americans – refugees and immigrants who represent a cultural and demographic change that is the foundational cornerstone of Erie’s future. “Refugees, not just ‘normal’ immigrants, make up some 10 percent of its population, which would be comparable to some 32 million on the national scale,” noted James Fallows in “Erie and America.” Both the statistic and the projection are significant.

“We met Albanians, Bosnians, Bhutanese, Burmese, Syrians, and many others,” Fallows continued. “These are the very people Donald Trump warned against in his speech in Erie ... The reaction in Erie itself seemed quite different from Trump’s.”

Deborah Fallows followed with a profile of the Zkrit family – who were resettled in Erie last June after leaving their home in Aleppo, Syria in 2012 – and the many agencies that assist in assimilation and acculturation here in Erie. “The words we became used to hearing,” she observed, “in Sioux Falls, or Burlington, which both have similar refugee populations as Erie, or in Dodge City, which is newly 60 percent Hispanic – were ‘We embrace each other’ or ‘They make our community stronger.’”

In an election year that featured xenophobic rhetoric from one side and a national conversation that has the world reeling about the philosophic nature of politics and life as we know it, a mid-sized, middle-American enclave with a penchant for tolerance and

inclusion is not only a welcome relief, it’s catching fire.

Since those articles were released, there’s been a BBC film crew that came to Radius Co-Work to talk Election 2016 and Erie’s next socioeconomic turn, and a reporter from Spain’s largest daily publication, *El País*, who illustrated Erie’s success integrating refugees by sharing the story of Jefferson Educational Society Vice President and Executive Director, Ferki Ferati, whose family arrived in Erie in 1999 after fleeing the war in Kosovo.

In that spirit, it’s my pleasure to (re)introduce one of Erie’s finest adopted sons, Maitham Basha-Agha. For avid *Reader* readers, Maitham is no stranger. I profiled Maitham in 2014 after he returned from Iraq. It was the first time he had visited Iraq since leaving in 2000 at age 12. His story and his work have been featured four other times in 2014 and 2015.

I first met Maitham ca. 2008 when he was a student at Edinboro University. He was smart and inquisitive, but humble and reserved. He maintains those qualities today and marshals them to his advantage.

In 2014, before he went to Iraq, someone contacted me and asked if I’d chat with an aspiring filmmaker wanting to tell the story of Erie’s “New Americans.” I agreed and was reconnected with Maitham, who was working for Sarah Reed Children’s Center, helping 5th- and 6th-graders in the Erie School District develop social skills that underlie sound life decisions. We met and discussed process and technique. Three months later, I received an email from Maitham. I was expecting him to ask about next steps, but he

was already done with his documentary. His email was inviting me to the premiere at East High School.

That’s how he rolls.

For the past two years, Maitham called a village in Botswana his home, serving in the Peace Corps. While abroad, he documented his experience and shared the lives of those he encountered through the lens of his camera and a Facebook page called “The People of Southern Africa.” His time there and the people he met have redefined his life and mission. In a few months, he’ll return to Africa to continue his life and follow his heart. In the interim, we’re lucky enough to have him join the team at the *Erie Reader* to share the stories of other refugees who are starting over in our communi-

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ty and who now call Erie home.

Maitham’s a truly inspiring photographer and a great human being. In the spirit of the international conversation that’s taking place *about* Erie, we’ll reap the benefits of his work, his experience, and the added value to our community when a refugee calls Erie home.

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



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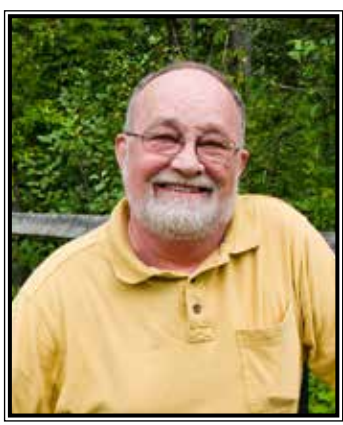
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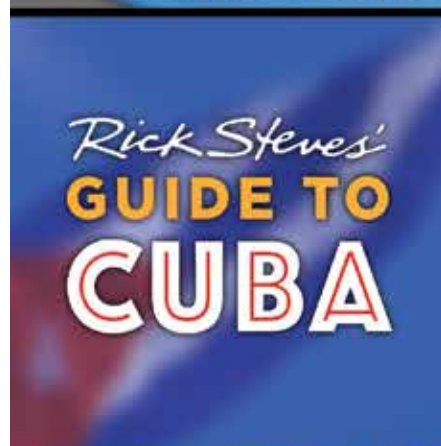
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Just a Thought

Erie stands with Standing Rock



Local vigil organizer Matthew Ochalek, of Mary the Apostle Catholic Worker, addresses the crowd of about 100 demonstrators gathered in front of the Federal Building at State Street and South Park Row in downtown Erie.

One young woman holds a homemade sign that reads, "I stand with Standing Rock #NoDAPL" in black marker. She's made creative use of a frozen dinner box, unsealing its edges and writing on the plain cardboard side.

A girl, still in her school uniform, stands on one of the concrete planters that line South Park Row and State Street in downtown Erie. Her tireless arms support a sign that reads, "Is not water more important than oil?" Though she's probably a little young to understand the full gravity of this event, her eyes squint against the sun in fierce conviction that what she's doing is of critical importance.

It's Tuesday, Nov. 15, and we're gathered as part of a global day of action against the Dakota Access pipeline. Over 300 vigils are being held worldwide today, to recognize this assault on indigenous rights.

Speakers pass a mic. One woman reads a list of U.S. pipeline failures – just in the *last two months* – which have killed and injured people or contaminated water sources. When she flips the page she's reading from, I stop counting.

According to *Time* magazine, the Dakota Access Pipeline "would travel underneath the Missouri River, the primary drinking water source for the Standing Rock Sioux ... Builders of the pipeline insist that they have taken extraordinary measures to safeguard against disaster, but opponents point out that even the safest pipelines can

leak. The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) has reported more than 3,300 incidents of leaks and ruptures at oil and gas pipelines since 2010. And even the smallest spill could damage the tribe's water supply. The Standing Rock Sioux also argue that the pipeline traverses a sacred burial ground. And while the land being used for the pipeline is not technically on its reservation, tribal leaders

argue that the federal government did not adequately engage the Standing Rock Sioux during the permitting process – a requirement under federal law."

Incidentally, as the *Bismarck Tribune* reported, "An early proposal for the project to cross the Missouri River north of Bismarck, but one reason that route was rejected was its potential threat to Bismarck's water supply, documents show."

In Erie, it's been a clear, unseasonably warm day. But at sundown, it's growing cold. After an hour – the length of this vigil – my hands and feet are freezing, and I'm imagining how spicy I'll need to order the Japchae at Like My Thai to warm me up from the inside out.

I'm ashamed of these thoughts, but awash in physical empathy. In North Dakota, water protectors have been holding vigil for months, and will continue to do so as temperatures plummet.

Lately, though, the situation's urgency has escalated. President Obama's final days are seen as a last chance to halt the controversial pipeline, as Donald Trump "has between \$500,000 and \$1m invested in Energy Transfer Partners, with a further \$500,000 to \$1m holding in Phillips 66, which will have a 25 percent stake in the Dakota Access project once completed," according to *The Guardian*. Trump also "receiv[ed] more than \$100,000 in campaign contributions from [Energy Transfer Partners'] chief executive."

Making America great again clearly will not apply to *Native Americans*, to whom the rest of us are *all* immigrants.

Of course, even this Erie gathering, populated by human rights and environmental justice advocates young and old, is backlit by hypocrisy. For one, many of us drove here. Using oil. For another, places in our own region – including school districts – are named after displaced tribes.

I want desperately to live in an America that admits to its ongoing ignorance against those whose ancestors predate European "discovery." Admitting you have a problem is the first step toward recovery.

But even in the 21st century, we're reluctant to take it.

Being unable to purely live in con-

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cert with one's ideals is nothing new in modern life. But as numerous disenfranchised groups face increasing prejudice and oppression in the coming administration, efforts to align action with ideals are bound to increase, too. Even gestures, like this one being made by thousands worldwide on this day, feel powerful.

In a *Yes! Magazine* interview on Nov. 9, Sarah van Gelder asked Standing Rock Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II why he thinks this issue has attracted so much global attention.

"It's very basic and very simple," Archambault explained. "Water gives life to everything that has a soul or a spirit. And if you're standing up for water, there's a lot of people that will stand beside you."

You can't drink oil. Water is life.

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



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Why We Needed a Vigil for Democracy

Standing in solidarity with communities targeted in the 2016 election



Signs of protest at Perry Square during the "Vigil for Our Democracy" on Sunday, Nov. 13

strategy, the Willy Horton ad, and all the attempts to invalidate the first African-American president. Trump didn't create all of those things; he built upon them. Traditional conservative candidates have long been happy to refer to the "inner city," or "thugs," but when the KKK gives them a "hell-yeah" they feel compelled to denounce it. Not Trump.

Of course those who traffic in hate feel permission to lash out with violence and intimidation. Their guy won, and not in the way the other leaders have. Here come the swastikas, the beatings, the bullying. In America. In 2016.

Erie County voted for Trump. Erie County is 88 percent white. But the city of Erie has more Syrian refugees than New York City and Los Angeles combined, a vibrant African-American community, and a thriving LGBT community. We all live here, together.

The Vigil for Democracy wasn't to lick wounds after a disappointing election, nor a benign call for us to get along in spite of our differences. It was a show of power, for those who have been targeted and are vulnerable, against those who take Trump's ascendance

as license to attack.

We stood for the most basic human and democratic principles, which is why the TV coverage largely made it out to be an inoffensive call to come together. But make no mistake, standing for solidarity and unity against hate

Make no mistake, standing for solidarity and unity against hate is now an act of defiance. We were compelled to stand up for these values, because after decades of assault, they hang by a thread.

is now an act of defiance. We were compelled to stand up for these values, because after decades of assault, they hang by a thread. We came together because we are dangerously close to losing the civility and respect that ensures our individual and collective survival.

Daniel Doubet is the Northwest PA Organizer for Keystone Progress. He can be reached at dan@keystoneprogress.org.

By: Daniel Doubet

The headlines: "Racist graffiti greets Trump win across USA," "Trump Supporter Reportedly Punches Woman," "KKK Plans March to Celebrate Trump." And on social media: "My students are being harassed," "I had a woman yell at me because of my hijab," "I'm scared to go outside, you guys."

This is Donald Trump's America. And it's why I organized a Vigil for Democracy on Sunday, Nov. 13, when over 100 people came out to stand in solidarity with vulnerable

communities – and against hatred, bigotry, and misogyny.

To be clear, I was disappointed with the election results on a policy level. From our new state senator to the POTUS, voters went with a squad that thinks liberating more wealth for the richest Americans will magically lead to jobs, infrastructure, and possibly 50s-style casual wear.

Okay. That's politics. The people and policies I prefer don't always win. Their ideas have been tested, and we've seen these kinds of policies fail for – oh, dear – my entire life. I

think it's wrong, shortsighted, redundant; but it's not outside of typical American political affairs. We have different ideas about the role of government, always have. But over the same course, we've seen racial dog-whistles trotted out to build a coalition of people by dividing them.

Donald Trump brought something even worse: a play to outright hatred. Hatred of Mexicans, Muslims, the LGBT community, and women. Trump reaped this unrepentant hatred, but the seeds were sown by Nixon's southern

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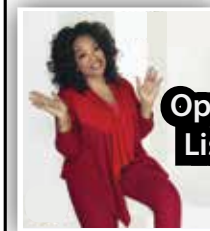
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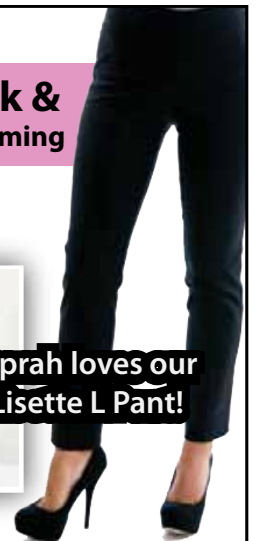
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News of the Weird

From sneaky Ohio surgeries to soul-snatching Alaskans

By: Chuck Shepherd

Democracy in Action

While "democracy" in most of America means electing representatives to run government, on Nov. 8 in San Francisco it also expected voters to decide 43 often vague, densely worded "issues" that, according to critics, could better be handled by the professionals who are, after all, elected by those very same voters. Except for hot-button issues like tax increases or hardened legislative gridlock, solutions on these "propositions" (e.g., how certain contractors' fees should be structured, which obscure official has primary responsibility for which obscure job, or the notorious proposition asking whether actors in the tax-paying porno industry must use condoms) would be, in other states, left to elected officials, lessening voter need for a deep dive into civics. [CityLab.com, 11-7-2016]

Police Report

Inexplicable: (1) The police chief of Bath Township, Ohio, acknowledged the overnight break-in on Oct. 10 or 11 at the University Hospitals Ghent Family Practice, but said nothing was missing. It appeared that an intruder (or intruders) had performed some medical procedure in a clinical office (probably on an ear) because instruments were left in bowls and a surgical glove and medication wrappings tossed into a trash

can (and a gown left on a table). (2) A 35-year-old man was detained by police in Vancouver, British Columbia, in October after a home break-in in which the intruder took off his clothes, grabbed some eggs and began preparing a meal. The homeowner, elsewhere in the house, noticed the commotion and the intruder fled (still naked). [WEWS-TV (Cleveland), 10-27-2016] [CTV News (Vancouver), 10-20-2016]

How To Tell If You've Had Too Much To Drink: Ashley Basich, 49, was arrested in Cheyenne, Wyoming, in October and charged with DUI after police found her, late at night, using an industrial forklift to pick up and move a van that she explained was blocking her driveway. Problems: She works for the state forestry department and had commandeered a state-owned vehicle, she had a cooler of beer in the forklift and was operating it while wearing flip-flops (OSHA violation!), and the van "blocking" her driveway was her own. [Wyoming Tribune Eagle (Cheyenne), 11-2-2016]

Though most Chicago Police Department officers get no more than five civilian complaints in their entire careers (according to one defense attorney), CPD internal records released in October reveal that some had more than 100, and, of 13,000 complaints over 47 years in which police wrongdoing was conceded, only 68 cases resulted in the officer actually being fired (although the worst po-

lice offender, Jerome Finnigan, with 157 complaints over two decades, is now in federal prison). [Associated Press via Chicago Tribune, 10-15-2016]

Compelling Explanations: Two men in rural Coffee County, Georgia, told sheriff's deputies in November that they had planned to soon attack a science-research center in Alaska because peoples' "souls" were trapped there and needed to be released (or at least that is what God told Michael Mancil, 30, and James Dryden Jr., 22, causing them to amass a small, but "something out of a movie" arsenal, according to the sheriff). The High Frequency Active Aural Research Facility, run by the University of Alaska Fairbanks, has long been a target of conspiracists, in that "the study of the Earth's atmosphere" obviously, they say, facilitates "mind control," snatching souls. [WALB-TV (Albany, Ga.), 11-1-2016]

Well, Of Course! (1) Motorist Luke Campbell, 28, was arrested near Minneapolis in September and charged with firing his gun at several passing cars, wounding one man (a bus passenger) explaining to a bystander that shooting at other vehicles "relieves stress." (2) Briton Mark Wright, 45, caught with illegal drugs taped to his penis following his arrest for burglary, told Newcastle Crown Court in September that he had "hidden" them there to keep them secret from his wife (perhaps identifying one place that she no longer visits). [Star Tribune (Min-

neapolis), 9-23-2016] [The Chronicle (Newcastle), 9-28-2016]

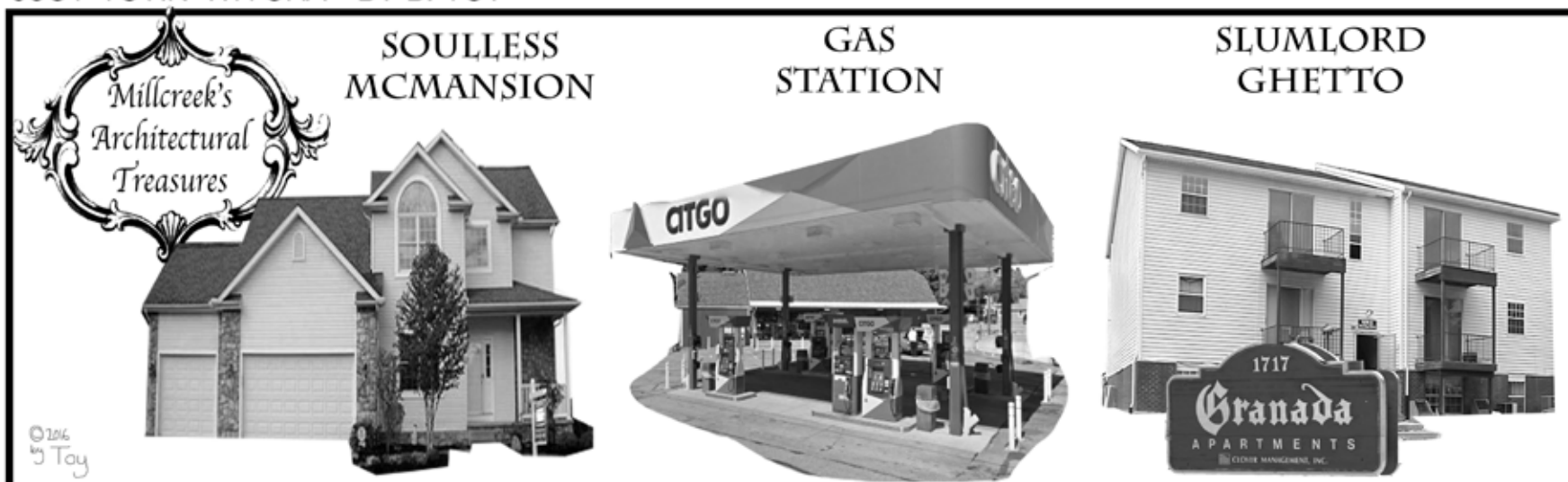
Leading Economic Indicators

Recent Hospital Bills: (1) Paula R D'Amore claimed she deserved a discount from the \$7,400 "delivery room" charge for the April birth of her daughter at Boca Raton (Florida) Regional Hospital because the baby was actually born in the backseat of her car in the hospital's parking lot. (Nurses came out to assist D'Amore's husband in the final stages, but, said D'Amore, only the placenta was delivered inside.) (2) In October, new father Ryan Grassley balked at the \$39.95 line-item charge from Utah Valley Hospital (Provo, Utah) for the mother's holding her new C-section son momentarily to her bare chest (a "bonding" ritual). (Doctors countered that C-section mothers are usually drugged and require extra security during that ritual but that Utah Valley might rethink making that charge a "line item.") [WPTV (West Palm Beach), 10-31-2016] [CTV News (Toronto), 10-4-2016]

People With Issues

A 49-year-old man was partly exonerated by a court in southern Sweden in September when he convinced the judge that he had a severe anxiety attack every time he received an "official" government letter in the mail (known as "window envelopes" in Sweden). Thus, though he was guilty of DUI and several other minor traffic offenses while operating

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his scooter, the judge dropped the charge of driving without a license because the man never opened the string of "frightening" letters informing him that operating a scooter requires a license. [The Local (Stockholm), 9-3-2016]

Least Competent Criminals

Jacob Roemer, 20, was arrested in Negaunee Township, Michigan, after a brief chase on Oct. 29 following an attempted home invasion. The resident had confronted him, chasing Roemer into the woods, where a State Police dog eventually found him lying on the ground unconscious and bloody, after, in the darkness, running into a tree and knocking himself out. [Marquette Mining Journal, 10-30-2016]

Recurring Themes

The most recent case in which an unlucky cannabis grower came to police attention occurred in Adelaide, Australia, in August when a motorist accidentally veered off the road and crashed into a grow house, collapsing part of a wall. Arriving police peered inside and quickly began a search for the residents, who were not at home. (2) The latest market price for a coveted automobile license plate is apparently the equivalent of \$9 million the amount paid by Dubai developer Balwinder Sahni at government auction recently for plate number "5." [The

Advertiser (Adelaide), 8-1-2016] [CNN Money (Dubai), 10-31-2016]

Readers' Choice

For not the first time in history, a fire broke out this year in a hospital operating room caused by the patient's passing gas during a laser procedure. The patient at Tokyo Medical University Hospital, in her 30s, suffered burns across her legs in the April incident, which was finally reported in the Japanese press in October when the hospital completed its investigation. [Asahi Shimbun (Tokyo), 10-30-2016]

The Passing Parade

Asher Woodworth, 30, was charged with misdemeanor traffic obstruction in the Portland, Maine, arts district in October as he stood in a street after covering himself with branches of evergreen trees. A friend described Woodworth as a performance artist contrasting his preferred "slow life" with the bustle of downtown traffic. (2) Aldeburgh Golf Club in England saw fit in September to issue a special rule allowing a no-stroke ball "drop" for players plagued by neighbor Peter Bryson's cat Merlin's habit of snatching about six balls a day from the 14th fairway. [Portland Press Herald, 10-26-2016] [BBC News, 9-19-2016]

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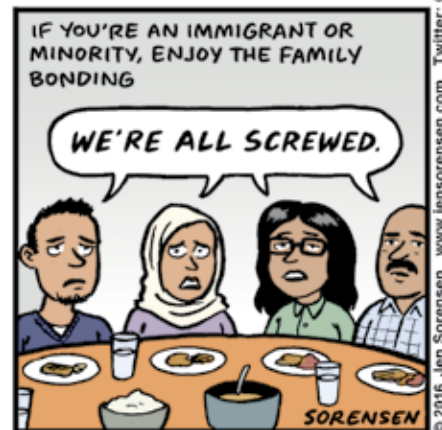
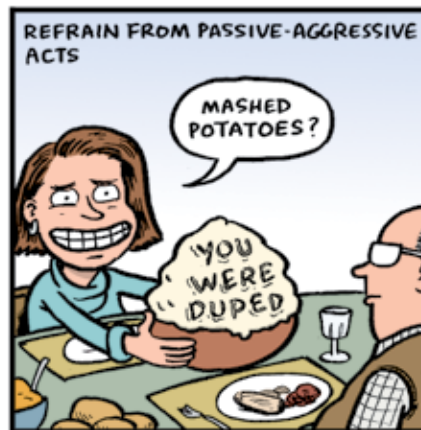
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From Rails to Riches: The Eastside Opportunity Corridor

Local politicians Breneman and Brennan unite to engage the community and combat Erie's east side blight.



Erie County Councilman Jay Breneman (left) and Erie City Councilman David Brennan discuss the renovations of the Eastside Opportunity Corridor near East 19th Street and Wallace Street.

MAITHAM BASHA-AGHA

By: Ben Speggen

Historically, progress moves slowly on Erie's East 19th Street. The area first took shape from an idea born in Buffalo in the 1880s. That idea – the Nickel Plate Railroad – would define that region of Erie for the next century.

The rail line snaked its way south from Buffalo through Erie and onward to Chicago. Operating as both a cargo and a passenger line, the Nickel Plate Railroad – preceding Norfolk Southern Corp. – knifed through a residential stretch of Erie, bridging the much smaller Erie to its northern Rust Belt sibling Buffalo and the Midwestern megametropolis Chicago.

But such linking came at the cost of hauling in pollution and freighting in fear.

At its very beginning, Erie opposed the idea for various reasons – crime and safety key among them. And because the community seemed largely opposed to the tracks being laid, the railroad company broke ground on a Sunday since the courthouse wouldn't be open and officials or citizens

couldn't delay what the company saw as the inevitable lynchpin between Buffalo and the Midwest.

So in rolled the heavy plumes of exhaust. The deafening blare of horns. The danger of children playing near the tracks. The halting of traffic.

After decades of the community railing against it, the connection – being a key stop along the Buffalo-Chicago path – hadn't changed the minds of Erie residents and officials.

In the 1960s, one Erie politician began what would become a half-century battle to unstack the iron snakes in the area. Unrestricted by term limits, Erie Mayor Lou Tullio called for the removal of the tracks decade after decade and term after term.

Not until Sept. 27, 2001 – 10 years after Tullio's death – would the last freight train roll down 19th Street. Eight months later, politicians, dignitaries, and a few lucky others boarded the final passenger train – a ceremony, really – to cruise from Greengarden Road to Parade Street at an 8-mph lull.

So up came the tracks, and a

collective sigh of relief in the name of safety swept over Erie politicians and citizens alike. But before the community could heal the scars left where lines of steel lay for more than a century, in rolled something else – busted couches, broken TVs, and even discarded hot tubs.

It's easy to confuse them based on their last names only. It also doesn't help that they're both Erie council members.

The similarities continue in each man's brand of politics, perhaps at the heart of what drew them to work on a community project together: The Eastside Opportunity Corridor (EOC).

"Once he was in office, Jay came to me with the idea," says Erie City Councilman David Brennan. But before he began serving Erie as an elected official, County Councilman Jay Breneman says he knew he wanted to work on a project in this region.

Although they've become household names in the Erie political arena, neither has led a traditional path to office. Erie east side native Brennan

filled the vacancy left on City Council after the death of Jim Thompson. As the term expired, the local architect would go on to win handily in 2013 and serve as the council's president until 2016.

Breneman, meanwhile, recently declared his bid for Erie's mayoral seat – up for grabs in 2017, as current Mayor Joe Sinnott terms out due to limits instituted after Tullio's historic six terms. Breneman grew up in western Montana, joined the U.S. Army around the same time the last freight train rumbled down 19th Street, and met his wife Jamie, who grew up in Erie. When it was time to settle down after an honorable discharge, the Brenemans decided to call Erie home. And like Brennan, Breneman wanted to make a

man says. "It'd go from neighborhood to neighborhood, but I saw something in between – and I said, 'Wait a second, what the hell was that?'"

That was – and largely still is – the scene on East 19th Street. Devoid now of train tracks, the street became littered with whatever can be obscured by brush and neglected lots.

"You see the garbage built up – and building up – in this area, and you have to think: Why not do something for the entire community here?" adds Brennan, who grew up near the area.

A less traversed pathway running east to west, East 19th Street is residential, rundown, and easy to overlook. Choked out by blight and overgrown vegetation, it's an incubator for crime. After all, where it's easy – and perceivably acceptable – to ditch a hot tub, it's easy to think no one's watching for other, more nefarious activity.

So the brief overview of how the EOC got started goes: One day Jay calls Dave. Jay and Dave decide to go for a walk. The walk they take spans 2.4 miles, starting at State Street and ending near Rodger Young Park on Downing Avenue. Dressed in overalls and ready for work but unnoticed by most eyes, as Thomas Edison once quipped, Opportunity stands at each intersection they cross. Jay and Dave see it. While naysayers might think the cleanup and reimagining of an area to be too difficult, the councilmen see the opportunity in the difficulty. They see the need not just to stop blight at 19th Street but to curb it, to beat it back, to reclaim the area for those living in it because their common political threads are community and progress woven together.

Both men are clear that what

Given its history of development, the progress made in the short existence of the EOC is a pace-changer for this region of Erie.

difference.

Thanks in part to a strong grassroots effort, Breneman, an outsider, upset two-term incumbent County Councilman Ronald "Whitey" Cleaver in 2013 for his first foray into politics. But two years before that, in the summer between completing his bachelor's degree and starting his graduate work, he was interning at the Erie Area Council of Governments.

"Each day, the bus I would take took that route," Brene-



Devoid now of train tracks, the street became littered with whatever can be obscured by brush and neglected lots.

MANTHAM BASHA-AGHA

they have is a vision, not a “plan.” It’s not that they don’t have a strategy on paper for the area – in fact, a strategic plan for the EOC does exist and is available online – it’s more that the two see this opportunity as an evolving one that needn’t be encumbered by what’s simply on paper. Brennan and Breneman want to take action. But more importantly, they stress, they recognize that the community wants to take action and the community must be at the forefront of reshaping 19th Street.

“It’s about time,” Breneman says. “That’s what we’re hearing the most when we knock on the doors of those in the area.”

Breneman’s 4th District, which abuts County Councilman Andre Horton’s 2nd District, is diverse. It’s young and old. Black and white. Poor and ... less poor. It doesn’t take a degree in urban planning to know that litter, social isolation, and vacant lots lower property values in a neighborhood.

“There are residents who’ve invested thousands of dollars of their own money in trying to better their neighborhood,” Breneman says. “This is a way of ensuring that their investment doesn’t go overlooked or forgotten – it’s a way to bolster their investment.”

Such investment, he adds, is “a collaborative approach among local governments,

area college students, neighborhood residents, and experts in the field of architecture and community development to transform the former rail line into a connector to area parks, neighborhoods, businesses, and community destinations.”

To date, that collaboration has been a bloom.

The Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network’s Eastside Multicultural Community (EMC), which spans East 12th to 26th streets and State Street to East Avenue, has made the EOC a priority, second only to developing “a comprehensive blight removal plan and to transition blighted properties into productive uses,” according to their EMC Revitalization Plan.

The first injection of impact capital to the region came from Erie County government. Under the County’s 2016 budget, \$5,000 was committed to, as Breneman puts it, “empower and engage citizens along the Corridor.”

That investment has gone toward a series of neighborhood cleanups, one of which featured an Environmental Problem Solving Class from Mercyhurst University and SSJNN’s EMC hauling away eight tons of trash on Oct. 22, 2015. On May 21, 2016, the SSJNN hosted Celebrate EMC!, which included a cleanup, free lunch for participants, raffles, and entertainment. The day

also gave citizens the opportunity to review the vision for the EOC – and the hundreds in attendance overwhelmingly supported the direction of the collaborative effort.

“This isn’t Jay and Dave’s thing,” Brennan adds. “If we can get the momentum going and step back to allow the community to take the lead, that means we’ve done something right.”

And things are rolling along.

In May 2016, the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority selected the Lake Erie Region Conservancy (LERC), a land conservancy founded in 2000 to identify and protect natural and cultural resources in the Erie area, to launch a pilot concept for the EOC with an operational grant of \$50,000, which will be matched one-to-one.

For the pilot grant, funding will enable: an advisory committee consisting of neighborhood stakeholders, public officials, and businesses; at least three public meetings; a document capturing planning efforts, neighborhood input, and the feasibility of implementing aspects of the EOC; preliminary engineering and design for street crossings and bicycle lanes; and the improvement of recreational spaces along the corridor.

Additionally, Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper committed \$10,000 through special project funding with a required match of \$5,000 in June 2016. The funding will go toward a detailed construction plan, mapping, drawings, and cost estimates prepared by a qualified professional, as well as public outreach.

What’s more, the EOC has received funding pledges from local businesses. Velocity Network – the local service internet provider deploying fiber internet throughout the

region, which plans to move its headquarters to downtown Erie – pledged an initial \$50,000 for technology infrastructure during the implementation phase.

General contracting company E.E. Austin & Son, located in the neighborhood at 1919 Reed Street, has committed \$11,000 in concrete and construction. In a letter of support to LERC Director Tom Fuhrman, E.E. Austin Manger Peter S. Austin said the company “wholeheartedly supports this plan,” adding, “we take great interest in this attempt to create a space that we and our neighbors can be proud of.”

It’s being furthered through conversations with elected state officials who represent the area, Rep. Pat Harkins and Sen. Sean Wiley, along with meetings with the more than 60 businesses, nonprofits, and organizations within walking distance of the area. Negotiations for a lease of the land still owned by Norfolk Southern is promising.

Signage, like historical markers, as well as public art and a bike trail, are ideas in the works, Brennan says. But ultimately, what happens along 19th Street will be up to the community.

“By improving the area, it improves the safety. By improving the aesthetics, people take ownership of it. That’s a very important part of this process,” Brennan explains. “We want the people in the area to take ownership of the area. We want this to be a neighborhood initiative, not just something we develop.”

To both Breneman and Brennan, the Eastside Opportunity Corridor is about placemaking.

“We want to provide residents and business owners in the area the opportunity to design their neighborhood. When we think of big investments or economic development, we think of buildings being razed, building up big projects,” Bren-

eman says. “In this case, we’re not tearing anything down. Instead, we’re engaging people in the area and asking them to design this blighted stretch of property. If we can leverage resources to make it happen, I think that’s the best relationship any elected official can have with any community member.”

“Instead of people coming from the outside – consultants, professionals – saying ‘We think you should build this ...,’ placemaking, really, is asking the people who live in the neighborhood, who work in the neighborhood: ‘What do you want to see? What do you think will work here?’ We want the people in the community, in this neighborhood, to construct these things and offer the resources and the ideas,” Brennan adds. “We’re just out there trying to bring it all together.”

Given its history of development, the progress made in the short existence of the EOC is a pace-changer for this region of Erie. The momentum begun by two Erie politicians with area residents and local organizations to link a community not to megametropolises but to its residents is inspiring and encouraging – and a clear illustration that Erie is capable of collaboration.

Ben Speggen found inspiration in – and paraphrases with apologies here – the Thomas Edison quote: “Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work,” as well as Winston Churchill’s quip that “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.” Projects like the Eastside Opportunity Corridor, which can be found on Facebook at facebook.com/eastsideopportunitycorridor, give him hope for Erie. He can be reached at bSpeggen@ErieReader.com and you can follow him on Twitter @BenSpeggen.

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Kings Rook Club Goes with the Funktional Flow



You could say that Funktional Flow is a post in the hotbed of jam activity that is Buffalo.

Erie being close by enough to get down by its warmth is something to be thankful for any time of year. And Funktional Flow coming to make a hybrid-sound blast of this Thanksgiving Eve at the Kings Rook Club? Well, that's good cause for some proper gratitude, too.

Even better, they're presenting new material this holiday season, and say they can't wait to be back this way again.

"We have a blast every time we play the Rook," says guitarist/vocalist Joe Lewis. "Some of our best gigs have been there ... every time we've played there. It could be the lighted floor or something."

Whatever it is, it's good – and for it, be grateful. – Ryan Smith

10 p.m. // 1921 Peach St. // [facebook.com/kingsrookclub](https://www.facebook.com/kingsrookclub)

Friday, Nov. 25

Battlecross Charges into Basement Transmissions



Detroit Thrash Metal band Battlecross is charging into Erie again, almost two years to the day since their last Winter Warriors tour brought

them to Basement Transmissions.

The self-proclaimed "Blue Collar Thrash Metal" group combines elements of thrash metal, melodic metal, and metalcore, to create a high energy, adrenaline-fueled experience that any metal fan can enjoy. The band formed in 2003, but didn't release their debut album **Push Pull Destroy** until 2010, which caught the attention of Metal Blade Records, one of the most prestigious record labels in the metal genre. The band has since released three more albums on the label, two of which peaked in the top five of the Heatseekers Albums chart. Their latest album, **Rise to Power**, was released in 2015 and features the singles "Not Your Slave" and "Spoiled."

Touring with Battlecross are two other bands on Metal Blade's roster, Allegaeon and Necromancing the Stone. The two bands play distinct styles, opposite on the metal spectrum. Allegaeon is of extreme Death Metal/Grindcore persuasion, while Necromancing the Stone - in musical virtuosity, vocal style, and extensive track lengths - is comparable to 80s metal bands like Iron Maiden and Judas Priest.

Local opening acts for the night are Amavasya, Primal Scream Therapy, and Narwhal Bloodbath, all of whom exhibit massive talent, and are among the backbone of Erie's local metal scene. So come out and support these local and touring metal bands, bang your head, and have a good time. – Tommy Shannon

6 p.m. // Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11th St. // All ages // \$13 advance, \$15 day of show // [ticketfly.com/event/1325657-battlecross-erie](https://www.ticketfly.com/event/1325657-battlecross-erie)

Friday, Nov. 25

*This Wonderful Life is Staged at PACA



A classic film about the importance of Everyman will be portrayed by a single man on an Erie stage.

The Performing Artists Collective

Alliance (PACA) production of **This Wonderful Life** is a theatrical version of the classic 1946 Jimmy Stewart film **It's a Wonderful Life**, as portrayed by local actor, Ken Falkenhagen.

Falkenhagen described the production via email: "It's exactly what it sounds like – a one-man version of the old Frank Capra film. I play (nearly) every single role – over 30 characters! – in a stage adaptation of the iconic holiday

"It's a weird and wonderful reworking of the classic holiday story about the effect that one hardworking man's life has on all the other people around him."

film: from Everyman George Bailey to evil, old Mr. Potter, to Clarence, the dotty angel, to Annie, the maid."

He added, "It's a weird and wonderful reworking of the classic holiday story about the effect that one hardworking man's life has on all the other people around him."

A PACA board member, Falkenhagen has also performed or served as theatre staff at the Riverside Inn for the past 14 seasons. In addition to working with the comedy troupe In All Seriousness, he's appeared in the last two PACA Christmas productions.

"I think people often mistake [**Life**] for a Christmas story. And yes, the movie is primarily set on Christmas Eve, and it's played on TV every Christmas, but it's not about Christmas," explained Falkenhagen. "It's about all the dark days we have to get through and how we persevere through them to get to the next good day." – Gregory Greenleaf-Knepp

8 p.m. on Nov. 25-26, Dec. 2-3 & 9-10; 2 p.m. on Nov. 27, Dec. 4 & 11 // 1505 State St., 2nd Floor // \$10 // 434.0687, paca1505.com, or [Facebook.com/paca1505](https://www.facebook.com/paca1505)

Saturday, Nov. 26

Keep it Local, Keep it Unique at the Made in Erie Marketplace

It's unanimous: Supporting Erie businesses is beneficial to both residents and the economy. One great way to discover new creations and companies is to stop by the 4th annual Made in Erie Marketplace on Nov. 26 at the Polish Falcons, Nest 610. Over 40 vendors will



display and sell their wares, many of whom don't actually have their own storefronts. So this event is an important and unusual chance to check out some new goods.

"Events like Made in Erie Marketplace foster one of the greatest assets of our region – that is the talent of local makers and the fervor the community has for supporting them."

Additionally, the Marketplace has moved to a venue this year that will harbor socialization. Food and drink will be available for purchase, and people will be encouraged to come together and hang out – all to further the sense of Erie community that organizers hope to cultivate. Paige Bosnyak, event organizer, explains: "Events like Made in Erie Marketplace foster one of the greatest assets of our region – that is the talent of local makers and the fervor the community has for supporting them."

Some of the event's offerings are ChyDezign's jewelry with a musical theme, exclusive limited edition acorn ornaments hand-crafted by Harry Noll, garden gifts by A Touch of Whimsy, Sea Sprite Creations, and Dragonfly Lake Scents. – Miriam Lamey

10 a.m. to 5 p.m. // Polish Falcons, Nest 610 // 431 E. 3rd St. // ATM on site // 452.6146

Wednesday, Nov. 30

The Music Takes Action Benefit Event is Presented by The Junior League of Erie

The Junior League of Erie and the Erie Philharmonic will come together on Nov. 30 to help change the lives of local underprivileged children. A benefit recital at the Erie Art Muse-

CALENDAR



um will feature live music from the acoustic duo “Delaware Gap,” a jazz combo, drinks, a meet and greet with Erie Philharmonic’s Maestro Daniel Meyer, and a silent auction. The evening will culminate in a performance featuring musicians of the Erie Philharmonic orchestra. Proceeds will directly sustain a long-term residen-

“The Erie Philharmonic aims to bring music into preschool classes to promote language and literacy development, and to prepare them for success in school and beyond.”

cy program at St. Benedict’s Center Early Childhood Program, as well as additional music outreach efforts in the area. Funds raised for the residency program will support the ongoing work of teaching artist Sarah Lee, who has devoted her musical talents to creating positive musical experiences and

fostering early music appreciation and literacy skills in young students. The Erie Philharmonic aims to bring music into preschool classes to promote language and literacy development, and to prepare them for success in school and beyond.

Since its start two years ago, the small residency reaching just 30 students has grown to a 20-week, 60-day program serving more than twice that many. Data collected over the past two years has already shown the program to have a life-changing effect on the students involved, according to the event’s website.

By participating in this exciting evening, you will be helping to ensure the program is funded for the year to come. – Ella Julian

6:30 to 8:30 p.m. // Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. // \$40 // 316.706.7947 // juniorleagueoferie.com

Friday, Dec. 2

Fourteen Locations Welcome After-hours Visitors to Gallery Night

Show up to an art exhibition after hours on most nights and you might be classified a burglar. Show up to an art exhibition after hours on Gallery Night and you will likely be considered a welcome guest. Just a word of warn-



ing if you were to scheme a heist on this particular evening – accepting hospitality in a catsuit may reflect poorly on you. Not to mention your suction mitts may compromise your ability to graze and sip – and consequently detect tannins (gauche save your soul).

I’m sorry if that’s too bitterly astringent for you to swallow – there will be other times to slink and/or skulk. Gallery Night is intended to be an

Show up to an art exhibition after hours on Gallery Night and you will likely be considered a welcome guest.

open interchange between artists and those who would interpret, appreciate, or even acquire it (through non-illicit means, of course). Step out of the shadows and into the light to discuss, debate, inquire, or simply admire the offerings of 14 local galleries/studios, including Erie Art Museum, Glass Growers Gal-

lery, Erie Arts & Culture, and Radius CoWork Gallery. Your presence would do well to enhance the composition of the scene. – Matt Swanseger

7 to 10 p.m. // Various locations throughout the Erie area // Visit erieartmuseum.org or call 459.5477 for details.

Friday, Dec. 2

Erie Playhouse Has a Scrooge Loose



There’s no time like the present to reexamine your Christmas past, present, and future with the Erie Playhouse production of *Scrooge, ongoing throughout December.

The musical is an adaptation of the 1970 film of the same name, scored and scripted by English playwright Leslie Bricusse. The story, of course, is based on the 1843 novella *A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens. Set in pre-Ambien London, the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge nonetheless succumbs to a series of phantasmagoric visions during the

MUSIC

Dave VanAmburg & Friends

Nov. 23, 30 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Maxi’s Restaurant at Bel Aire Clarion Hotel, 2800 W. 8th St. jazzerie.com.

Funktional Flow

Nov. 23 — 8 p.m. to 2 a.m.
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. facebook.com/kingsrookclub.

Small Town Revolution

Nov. 23 — 9 p.m.
Oasis Pub, 3122 W. Lake Rd. facebook.com/Smalltownrevolutionband.

Ron Yarosz and the Vehicle

Nov. 23 — 9 p.m.
Scotty’s, 301 German St. facebook.com/Smalltownrevolutionband.

Sean Patrick & The Newgrass Revolution

Nov. 23 — 9 p.m.
Riverside: The Inn at Cambridge Springs, 1 Fountain Ave. theriversideinn.com.

Grunge Monkey

Nov. 24 — 8 to 10 p.m.
Presque Isle Downs & Casino, 8199 Perry Hwy. presqueisledowns.com.

Gem City Jazz Ensemble

Nov. 25 — 3 to 5:30 p.m.
Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier jazzerie.com.

Dave VanAmburg

Nov. 25 & Dec. 2 — 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.
Dickey’s, 3716 Liberty St. jazzerie.com.

Friday Night Jazz

Nov. 25 & Dec. 2 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Anchor In at Oasis Pub, 3122 W. Lake Rd. jazzerie.com.

Winter Warriors Tour: Battlecross, Allegaeon and Necromancing the Stone

Nov. 25 — 6 to 11 p.m.
Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11th St. basementtransmissions.com.

Bridget Allen

Nov. 25 — 7 p.m.
The Cork 1794, 17 W. Main St. cork1794.com.

Geek Army

Nov. 25 — 9 p.m.
Presque Isle Downs & Casino, 8199 Perry Hwy. presqueisledowns.com.

Blue Sky: Tribute to the Allman Brothers

Nov. 25 — 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St.

facebook.com/kingsrookclub.

Saturday Night Blues

Nov. 26 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Anchor In at Oasis Pub, 3122 W. Lake Rd. jazzerie.com.

The Groove

Nov. 26 — 9 p.m.
Presque Isle Downs & Casino, 8199 Perry Hwy. presqueisledowns.com.

Space Junk and Stereo Nest

Nov. 26 — 10 p.m. to 1 a.m.
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. facebook.com/kingsrookclub.

Uncharted Course

Nov. 27 — 1 to 4 p.m.
Arundel Cellars, 11727 E. Main Rd. arundelcellars.com.

Bach Cantata Vespers

Nov. 27 — 4 to 5 p.m.
Luther Memorial Church, 225 W. 10th St. lm-concerts.com.

Sing-alongs with Lori Burke

Nov. 28 — 10 to 10:30 a.m.
Edinboro Branch Library, 413 Plum St. erielibrary.org.

Music Takes Action

Nov. 30 — 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. eriephil.org.

Small Ensembles Concert

Nov. 30 — 7 p.m.
Walker Recital Hall, 501 E. 38th St. miac.mercyhurst.edu.

Colony Pub Trio

Dec. 1 — 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Colony Pub & Grille, 2670 W. 8th St. jazzerie.com.

Jr. Philharmonic Winter Ensembles Concert

Dec. 1 — 7 to 8 p.m.
H.O. Hirt Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. erielibrary.org.

Martina McBride

Dec. 1 — 7:30 p.m.
Warner Theatre, 811 State St. erieevents.com.

World AIDS Day Concert

Dec. 2 — 7 p.m.
Grace Fellowship International Church, 123 W. 10th St. gaudenziaerie.org.

Haewa CD Release Party

Dec. 2 — 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. facebook.com/kingsrookclub.

Singularity Saxophone Quartet

Dec. 3 — 2 p.m.
Walker Recital Hall, 501 E. 38th St. mercyhurst.edu.

Come Home for the Holidays

Dec. 3 — 2 to 3 & 8 to 10 p.m.
Warner Theatre, 811 State St. eriephil.org.

JD Blues, Jazz & Jam

Dec. 3 — 6 to 9 p.m.
814 Pub & Grille, 1325 State St. jazzerie.com.

Saturday Night Latin

Dec. 3 — 6 to 9 p.m.
Anchor In at Oasis Pub, 3122 W. Lake Rd. jazzerie.com.

Ryan Melquist Duo

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

Meadville Jazz Jam

Dec. 4 — 2 to 6 p.m.
Meadville Market House, 910 Market St. jazzerie.com.

Wind Ensemble Concert

Dec. 4 — 4 p.m.
Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. miac.mercyhurst.edu.

Annual Christmas Concert

Dec. 4 — 5 to 8 p.m.
First Unitarian Universalist Church of Girard, 107 Myrtle St. facebook.com/girarduuchurch.

Joe Robinson

Dec. 4 — 6 to 9 p.m.

PACA, 1505 State St. facebook.com/paca1505.

The Division Street Machine

Dec. 3 — 8:30 to 11:30 p.m.
Presque Isle Downs & Casino, 8199 Perry Hwy. facebook.com/pg/DivisionStreetMachine.

Small Town Revolution

Dec. 3 — 9:45 p.m.
Doc Holliday’s, 7425 Schultz Rd. facebook.com/Smalltownrevolutionband.

Storms Within

Dec. 3 — 10 p.m.
Bobby’s Place, 1201 W. 18th St. facebook.com/StormsWithin.

Aqueous

Dec. 3 — 10 p.m. to 1 a.m.
Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. facebook.com/kingsrookclub.

Presque Isle Flute Choir Winter Concert

Dec. 5 — 7 to 8 p.m.
H.O. Hirt Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. erielibrary.org.

Gem City Concert Band: Holiday Concert

Dec. 6 — 7 to 8:30 p.m.
St. John’s Lutheran Church, 2216 Peach St.

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EMPTY KEG
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THE POUR HOUSE
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night of Christmas Eve 1843. As anyone familiar with the story knows, it's a pretty bad trip.

First, the Ghost of Christmas Past reviews the circumstances that led him to become a miserable old man. Then, the Ghost of Christmas Present illuminates the ramifications of his current M.O. – in particular, bilking his underpaid clerk Bob Cratchit out of a decent standard of living (and healthcare for his sickly son Tiny Tim) while he greedily counts his coins. Lastly, the Ghost

There's no time like the present to reexamine your Christmas past, present, and future with the Erie Playhouse production of *Scrooge*, ongoing throughout December.

of Christmas Yet-to-Come shows Mr. Scrooge the consequences if he continues on this course – a lonely death with no mourning. Thankfully there is a next morning, and Scrooge redeems himself with charitable contributions galore – out of the goodness of his thawed-out heart, with no consideration to write-offs. If only this three-pronged approach to asshat-conversion therapy were available to every asshat in the 21st century.

The Playhouse production stars Rich Tryzbiak as the lead man, Charles Corritore (Bob), Diane Martone (Ethel), and Michael Corritore (Tiny Tim) as the Cratchit family, and Tom Wager as Jacob Marley. Patti Rudzinski and Joe

Greulich fill the roles of Christmas Past and Christmas Present, respectively.

Muppets, Smurfs, and even Klingons have retold this tale – but it remains as ever one of the more hopeful stories about humanity. – Matt Swansager

7:30 p.m. on Dec. 2, 3, 8-10, and 14-17; 2 p.m. on Dec. 10, 11, 18 // 13 W. 10th St. // erieplayhouse.org/shows/2016-17/scrooge // 454.2852 // \$24.90 (adults), \$17.90 (discount balcony), \$16.40 (students)

Friday, Dec. 2

Mercyhurst Dance Department Brings 'Tis the Season to Life



The Mercyhurst Dance Department will perform 'Tis the Season, featuring "The Nutcracker Suite," on Friday, Dec. 2 and Saturday, Dec. 3 at the Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center.

"We are excited because it's the first time they've done *The Nutcracker in five years," said Danielle Kaiser, administrative assistant for the Mercyhurst Dance Department.

The department is collaborating with Lesley Bories-Scalise, artistic director at Lake Erie Ballet.

A few weeks after this performance, the Mercyhurst dancers will perform with Lake Erie Ballet Dec. 16 through 18 at the Warner Theatre. While Mercyhurst's 'Tis the Season will feature only the second act of *The Nutcracker, the Lake Erie Ballet performance will include both acts, as it has done for 58 years.

However, the Mercyhurst show, with about 60 dance majors who have been practicing since September, will also include a segment called "Holiday Fun

"We are excited because it's the first time they've done *The Nutcracker* in five years."

on Fa La La Lane."

"We stress that it's the segment for the kids," Kaiser said.

There are singing Santa Clauses and dancing candy canes, and 20 to 30 dancers are on stage at a time.

"It's a little more light-hearted," Kaiser continued.

Admission is \$5 per person, but entry is free if audience members bring a non-perishable food item.

"It will get you in the holiday spirit," Kaiser said. – Tracy Geibel

4:30 and 7:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 2; 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 3 // Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. // \$5 // 824.3000 // miac.mercyhurst.edu/events/mercyhurst-dance-department-tis-the-season-featuring-the-nutcracker-suite/

Saturday, Dec. 3

Ring in the Snowy Season with Aqueous



Aqueous' gift for groundbreaking Aggrooves just keeps on giving. On Saturday, Dec. 3, this Buffalo-based jam powerhouse – fresh off the release of a new album and heavy touring – returns to the Kings Rook Club.

And now – more experienced and well-traveled than ever – they're increasingly progressive both compositionally and improvisationally, with world-class killer chops hitting on all sorts of sound spectrums.

"We're always listening to new music and trying to bring new styles to our music," says bassist Evan McPhaden. "We've been getting a bit spacey and soulful within our improvisation. I think our newer tunes tend to reflect the way we're headed sonically, and we're all really excited about it."

So are we. And this Erie show – like others of note from the past – is an extended stay, with two whole sets of Aqueous goodness bound to carry at least a couple of surprises for all the girls and boys.

"[Erie] shows are always so fun be-

gemcitybands.org.

Peter Mayer's Stars and Promises Wings of Angels

Dec. 7 — 7 to 9 p.m.

Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. facebook.com/events/215260488897386.

DANCE

The Nutcracker performed by Erie Contemporary Ballet Theatre

Nov. 26 — 7 p.m. & Nov. 27 — 3 p.m.

McDowell Intermediate Little Theatre, 3320 Caughey Rd. eriecbt.org.

'Tis the Season featuring The Nutcracker Suite

Dec. 2 — 4:30 & 7:30 p.m. & Dec. 3 — 11 a.m. & 2 p.m.

Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. miac.mercyhurst.edu.

The Quiltmaker's Gift

Dec. 2 — 7 p.m. & Dec. 3 — 4 p.m.

Erie First Assembly of God, 8150 Oliver Rd. sovereignballet.com.

FOOD & DRINK

Thanksgiving Eve Release

Nov. 23 — 5 to 11 p.m.

Lavery Brewing Company, 128 W. 12th St. facebook.com/laverybrewing.

Thanksgiving Brunch

Nov. 24 — 10:45 p.m.

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

Thanksgiving Dinner

Nov. 24 — 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Riverside: The Inn at Cambridge Springs, 1 Fountain Ave. theriversideinn.com.

Black Friday Beer Release

Nov. 25 — 3 to 10 p.m.

Erie Ale Works, 416 W. 12th St. eriealeworks.com.

Mind, Body, Beer

Nov. 29 — 7:30 p.m.

Erie Ale Works, 416 W. 12th St. facebook.com/pg/ErieAleWorks.

Veg-Out, Vegan Baking

Dec. 2 — 6 to 8 p.m.

Whole Foods Co-op, 1341 W. 26th St. theerievegsociety.org.

Santa Bar Crawl

Dec. 3 — 4 p.m.

Various Locations, facebook.com/SarahReedCC.

Quick and Easy Holiday Cookies and Breads

Dec. 6 — 1 p.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org.

FILM

Walking With Dinosaurs: Prehistoric Planet

Ongoing through Mar. 3, 2017 — 11 a.m. & 1 & 3 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. trepci.org.

Lewis & Clark: Great Journey West

Ongoing through Mar. 3, 2017 — noon & 4 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. trepci.org.

Journey to Space

Ongoing through Mar. 3, 2017 — 2 & 5 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. trepci.org.

Warren Miller's Here, There & Everywhere

Nov. 25, 26 — 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. trepci.org.

Mesa of Lost Women and Attack of the Giant Leeches

Nov. 25 — 8 to 10 p.m.

Erie Movie House, 3424 W. Lake Rd. facebook.com/ErieMovieHouse.

Funeral Home (1980)

Nov. 26 — 8 to 10 p.m.

Erie Movie House, 3424 W. Lake Rd. facebook.com/ErieMovieHouse.

I, Robot

Nov. 27 — 1:30 to 4 p.m.

Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. erielibrary.org.

Holiday Movie Marathon

Dec. 3 — 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

H.O. Hirt Auditorium Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. erielibrary.org.

VISUAL ARTS

Barry Underwood

Ongoing through Dec. 9

Bruce Gallery in Doucette Hall, 215 Meadville St. brucegallery.info.

Organic Forms and Pulsating Lines by Barbara and Julian Stanczak

Ongoing through Dec. 18

Cummings Gallery, 501 E. 38th St. miac.mercyhurst.edu.

Dark Garden

Ongoing through Jan. 8, 2017

Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. erieartmuseum.org.

Jose Picayo Polaroids: A Retrospective

Ongoing through Jan. 8, 2017

Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. erieartmuseum.org.

Noreen Finn, Recent Paintings

Ongoing through Jan. 10, 2017

Glass Growers Gallery, 10 E. 5th St. glassgrowersgallery.com.

Mood Swing Review: A solo exhibition by Ron Bayuzick

Ongoing through Feb. 11, 2017

Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. erieartmuseum.org.

Sergei Isupov: Artist Workshop & Lecture

Dec. 1 — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Edinboro University, 219 Meadville St. erieartmuseum.org.

CALENDAR

cause we get to stretch our legs out," says McPhaden. "With two sets of music, we can really dive deep into jams and get things flowing naturally. Plus, the atmosphere that the crowd brings at the shows is contagious! I think the band really feeds off of that." – Ryan Smith

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

Sunday, Dec. 4

Joe Robinson Brings the Blues to PACA

The people have spoken. (Or at least, the event organizers at PACA have.) Australian musician Joe Robinson will play a special performance for one night only. The blues performer takes the PACA stage on Dec. 4 for a "night of musical magic" with local artists Mckenzie Lee Sprague, Eric Brewer, and Claire Stuczynski. Tickets start at \$15 for general admission, but couples can purchase a special Sponsor package for \$100, which includes reserved seating and complimentary wine. All others can BYOB with proper ID.

Robinson plays a blend of rock, jazz, blues, and R&B; expect plenty of funky, neat guitar sounds at this gig, in addition to his skilled harmonica playing.



tion to his skilled harmonica playing. His sound is smooth and comparisons to John Mayer are not unfounded; check the acoustic version of "Hurricane" via Robinson's Facebook page to

Robinson plays a blend of rock, jazz, blues, and R&B; expect plenty of funky, neat guitar sounds at this gig, in addition to his skilled harmonica playing.

see the similarity. "Fireflies" is another great track for those unfamiliar with his work; it's light, soothing, but has

just a teeny bit of bite to keep listeners hooked. – Miriam Lamey

7 p.m. // 1505 State St. // paca1505.com, 434.0687, or [Facebook.com/paca1505](https://facebook.com/paca1505)

Tuesday, Dec. 6

Broadway Christmas Wonderland Visits the Warner Theatre



Anyone who's ever walked down an Erie street in winter might call the snow-covered city a "winter wonderland," but in December, Erie will be-

come a "Broadway Christmas Wonderland" for just one night.

NAC Entertainment will present its Broadway Christmas Wonderland show at the Warner Theatre on Dec. 6 at 7:30 p.m.

Advertised as "simply one of the most delightful and enchanting Christmas shows ever," this family-friendly performance tells an "unforgettable, nostalgic" Christmas tale about Santa and his helpers.

The show features some traditional Christmas songs and other holiday favorites, including "White Christmas," "Winter Wonderland," "Jingle Bells," and numerous others.

The show aims to "dazzle." The cast of 24 singers and dancers, dressed in bright, glittery costumes, will perform in front of elaborate sets to bring the stage to life. These talented men and women come from New York, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and even London, and tour for two months.

The show is produced by Spirit Productions and David King – known for *Spirit of the Dance, one of the biggest dance shows in the world. – Tracy Geibel

7:30 p.m. // 811 State St. // Tickets start at \$34 // 452.4857 // erieevents.com/events/broadway-christmas-wonderland/

Sergei Isupov: Hidden Messages

Dec. 2 through April 2, 2017
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. erieartmuseum.org

Gallery Night

Dec. 2 — 7 to 10 p.m.
Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. erieartmuseum.org

Senior Projects and Advanced Studio Projects

Dec. 6 through Dec. 16 (Opening Reception and Celebration Dec. 6 — 7 to 8 p.m.)

Allegheny College Doane Hall of Art, 520 N. Main St. allegheny.edu

THEATRE

Dark Play or Stories for Boys by Carlos Murillo

Nov. 25 — 8 p.m.
2nd Floor Renaissance Centre, 1001 State St. dramashop.org

This Wonderful Life

Nov. 25, 26 & Dec. 2, 3, 9, 10 — 8 p.m. & Nov. 27 & Dec. 4, 11 — 2:30 p.m.

PACA, 1505 State St. paca1505.com

A Christmas Pudding

Nov. 26 & Dec. 2, 3, 9, 10, 16, 17 — 7 p.m. & Nov. 27 & Dec. 4, 11 — 2:30 p.m. & Nov. 29, 30 & Dec. 6, 7, 13, 14 — noon

Riverside: The Inn at Cambridge Springs, 1 Fountain

Ave.theriversideinn.com

Fools

Nov. 26 — 7:30 p.m. & Nov. 27 — 3 p.m.

All An Act Theatre, 652 W. 17th St. allanact.net

Christmas Memories

Nov. 30 — noon & Dec. 2, 9, 16 — 7 p.m. & Dec. 3, 10, 17 — 5:30 p.m. & Dec. 4, 11, 18 — 2:30 p.m.

Station Dinner Theatre, 4940 Peach St. canterburyfeast.com

Girl Gone

Dec. 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11 — 7:30 p.m. & Dec. 4 — 2:30 p.m.

Edinboro University Diebold Center for the Performing Arts, 217 Meadville St. edinboro.edu

Scrooge

Dec. 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17 — 7:30 p.m. & Dec. 10, 11, 18 — 2 p.m.

Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10 St. erieplayhouse.org

It's Only Life: The Songs of John Bucchino

Dec. 2 — 8 p.m. & Dec. 3 — 2 & 8 p.m.

Schuster Theatre, 620 Sassafras St. gannon.edu

Broadway Christmas Wonderland

Dec. 6 — 7:30 p.m.

Warner Theatre, 811 State St. erieevents.com

COMMUNITY

Wall of Heroes

Ongoing through Nov. 30 — 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov

Tinker the T-Rex Comes to the TREC

Ongoing through Feb 24, 2017 — 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov

Tai Chi

Nov. 23, 25, 28, 30 — 9:30 to 10:15 a.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org

Zumba Gold

Nov. 23, 30 — 12:30 p.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org

Bowling for Fun

Nov. 23, 30 — 1 to 3 p.m.

Rolling Meadow Lanes, 3304 Zuck Rd. lifeworkserie.org

Oriental Painting

Nov. 23, 30 & Dec. 7 — 5 to 7 p.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org

Bayfront Brawl II MMA Cage Fighting

Nov. 23 — 7 p.m.

Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier erieevents.com

Rock the Mall

Nov. 24, 25

Millcreek Mall, 5800 Peach St. millcreekmall.net

Erie Otters vs. Sudbury

Nov. 24 — 7 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com

Medication Consultations

Nov. 25 — 9 a.m. to noon

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org

Festival of Trees

Nov. 25, 26 — 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. & Nov. 27 — 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier ahn.org

Warner Winter Wonderland Art & Craft Show

Nov. 26 — 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. & Nov. 27 — noon to 4 p.m.

Warner Theatre, 811 State St. erieevents.com

Made in Erie Marketplace

Nov. 26 — 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Polish Falcons Nest 610, 431 E. 3rd St. facebook.com/MadeinErieMarketplace

Small Business Saturday

Nov. 26 — 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Coffee in the Park, 4007 Main St. facebook.com/

CoffeeInThePark

Christmas Craft Show

Nov. 26, 27 — 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Riverside: The Inn at Cambridge Springs, 1 Fountain Ave. theriversideinn.com

Light Up North East

Nov. 26 — 6 to 9 p.m.

Gibson Park, 44 W. Main St. facebook.com/pg/TheNorthEastChamber

Aaron Kleiber

Nov. 26 — 6:45 & 9:30 p.m.

Jr's Last Laugh Comedy Club, 1402 State St. jrslastlaugh.net

Erie Otters vs. North Bay

Nov. 26 — 7 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com

Lake Erie Eagles

Nov. 27 — 1:30 p.m. & Nov. 30 — 7:30 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com

Vibrant Life Series: How to Read a Drug Facts Label

Nov. 28 — 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org

Files and Folders

Nov. 29 & Dec. 3 — 9 a.m. to noon

Room 212 Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front

St.erielibrary.org

Fit for Life Fitness Class

Nov. 29 — 9:30 to 10:15 a.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org

Teen Makers

Nov. 29 & Dec. 6, 13, 20, 27 — 3:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Teen Space in Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. erielibrary.org

Gentle Yoga

Nov. 29 — 5:30 p.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org

Erie Otters vs. Mississauga

Nov. 29 — 7 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com

Meadows Casino and Volant Winery Trip

Nov. 30 — 8 a.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org

Health Chats

Nov. 30 & Dec. 28 — 10:30 a.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org

Outside the Window: Owls

Nov. 30 — 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov



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Nature Ornaments

Nov. 30 — 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Asbury Woods Nature Center, 4105 Asbury Rd. asburywoods.org.

Cultural Series: The Sixth Floor, Who Was and Wasn't There?

Nov. 30 — 7 p.m.

Alex Theatre at Mercyhurst North East campus, 16 W. Division St. northeast.mercyhurst.edu.

Evening Fireside Talk: Raptors

Nov. 30 — 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Rotary Pavilion in Presque Isle State Park, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov.

Victorian Holidays at the Manse Free Holiday Weekend

Dec. 1, 2, 3, 4 — 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Historical Society of Erie County, 356 W. 6th St. eriehistory.com.

Microsoft Outlook

Dec. 1 — 5 to 8 p.m.

Room 212 Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. erielibrary.org.

Minecraft Play Maps: Grades 2 - 4

Dec. 2 — 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Box of Light Studio, 419 State St. boxoflight.org.

Erie BayHawks vs. Maine

Dec. 1 — 7 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809

French St. erieevents.com.

Basile

Dec. 1 — 7 p.m. Dec. 2, 3 — 6:30 & 9:30 p.m.

Jr's Last Laugh Comedy Club, 1402 State St. jrslastlaugh.net.

DIY Mandala Stone Snowflakes

Dec. 2 — 1 p.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org.

Downtown d'Lights

Dec. 2 — 5 to 8 p.m.

Perry Square, 568 State St. erielibrary.org.

Lights, Camera, Action Cheer and Dance Extravaganza

Dec. 3

Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafra Pier championcheercentral.com.

Clothing Distribution Party

Dec. 3 — 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 2216 Peach St. stjohnserie.org.

TREC the Halls

Dec. 3 — 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov.

Erie Animal Network Holiday Craft and Vendor Fair

Dec. 3, 4 — 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Chestnut Street Apartments,

7554 Chestnut St. facebook.com/erieanimalnetwork.

Schoolhouse Craft Festival

Dec. 3 — 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. & Dec. 4 — 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

McDowell Intermediate High School, 3320 Caughey Rd. asburywoods.org.

Sugar Plum Weekend

Dec. 3 — 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. & Dec. 4 — noon to 5 p.m.

North East Pennsylvania, facebook.com/pg/TheNorthEastChamber.

Idea Share

Dec. 3 — 1 to 2 p.m.

Peninsula Room Blasco Memorial Library, 160 E. Front St. erielibrary.org.

ABC's on the Rails with author Ken Springirth

Dec. 3 — 1 to 2 p.m.

Iroquois Branch Library, 4202 Iroquois Ave. erielibrary.org.

Red Gala Reception

Dec. 3 — 6 p.m.

Metropolitan Dance Club, 144 W. 13th St. gaudenziaerie.org.

Erie BayHawks vs. Westchester

Dec. 3 — 7 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

Paws & Claus

Dec. 4 — 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Humane Society of Northwestern Pennsylvania, 2407 Zimmerly Rd. humanesocietyofnwpa.com.

Medicinal Herbs Aboard Ships: Maritime Health for Sailors Workshop

Dec. 6 — 1 to 3 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov.

Presque Isle History Series: Ice on Presque Isle

Dec. 6 — 6 to 7 p.m.

Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Dr. events.dcnr.pa.gov.

Grief through the Holidays

Dec. 6 — 6:30 p.m.

Fairview Manor, 900 Manchester Rd. Nadine.Clement@hcfmanagement.com.

VIP Holiday Show

Dec. 7, 8

Bloom Collaborative, 138 E. 26th St. bloomcollaborative.org.

Personalized 12 Month Calendar

Dec. 7 — 1 p.m.

LifeWorks Erie, 406 Peach St. lifeworkserie.org.

Erie Otters vs. Niagara

Dec. 7 — 7 p.m.

Erie Insurance Arena, 809 French St. erieevents.com.

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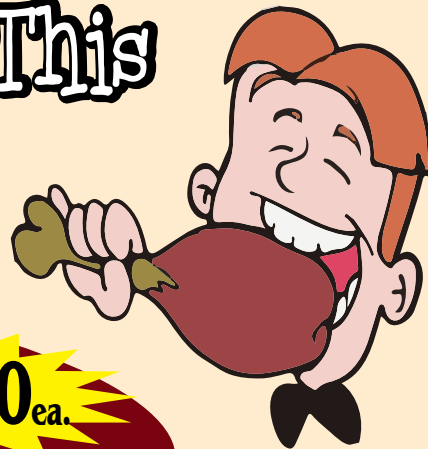
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A Frisson in Line, Shape, and Color

Barbara and Julian Stanczak at Mercyhurst University's Cummings Gallery



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

By: Mary Birdsong

The exhibit *Organic Forms & Pulsating Lines* brings together the artworks of husband and wife Barbara and Julian Stanczak. At first glance, one might think their pieces would not go well together. One would be wrong.

It's true their bodies of work stand alone in skill, expression, and temperament, and that in many ways, their pieces are formally in opposition to one another – Barbara exploring natural elements and organic form in three dimensions; Julian focusing on two-dimensional line and color. When exhibited collectively, however, they offer an opportunity to explore the diverse ways lines operate within works of art.

Julian has been studying the properties of line and color through techniques of Op Art, an abstract genre that builds optical illusions from the precise placement of lines, shapes, and color. The result is a sense of movement or distortion of space.

Julian has worked mostly with "the complexity of color relationships and their effect on forms and space." "Laced with Blue" displays this methodology at work. Thousands of small, tightly artic-

ulated blue squares are knitted together with precisely drawn yellow and black lines which overlay fields of green and purple. The painting hums with motion, the viewer's eyes moving in and out between the background and foreground, the elements taking turns receding and coming forward.

His artist statement says art must "transcend the pain of daily life, overcome the ordinary, in order to come to another visual plateau." And surely these works transcend, taking the viewer into a different visual, if not emotional, state.

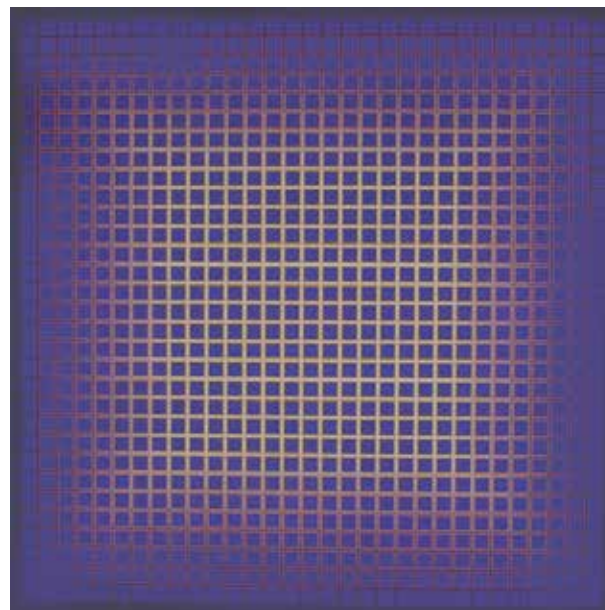
Barbara, on the other hand, has worked in sculpture for most of her artistic career. Her influence is nature, and

she says in her artist statement the media she uses are "mainly nature-made, materials that have the history of the earth and the story of their lifecycle imprinted in their veins and textures."

What results are works with sensuous, curved, irregular lines and shapes, often with rough live edges joined with highly worked surfaces. This allows the pieces to become what Barbara wanted them to be but still honors the essence of the material from which they were made.

This technique can be seen in "Stages of the Moon-Full" and "Stages of the Moon-Crescent," in which the smooth circle and crescent shapes are surrounded by unworked edges of white Italian marble.

Right: "Accompanied Blue," a 1980 work by Julian Stanczak. Above: "One Becomes Two," a 2012 calcite piece by Barbara Stanczak



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The translucent quality of the stone and the light reflecting off the polished surfaces evoke the cool silver of a winter moon.

"Golden Pod," conversely, has completely worked surfaces. In "Pod," Barbara suggests the idea of a rounded seed case with scooped out negative space at the top of a squared off piece of cherry. She then added luxurious gold and green inside the cups to depict nature as the ultimate gem.

Together, the pieces push and pull the

When exhibited collectively, these works offer an opportunity to explore the diverse ways lines operate within works of art.

viewer's eyes from the crisp edges in Julian's work to the softer undulating contours of Barbara's in an enjoyable, moving dialogue. One in which the viewer is always welcome. You could say they marry well.

Through Dec. 18 // 9:00 a.m. to 4 p.m. from Monday – Friday; 2 to 5 p.m. on Saturday & Sunday; closed Nov. 23-27 // 824.2902 // miac.mercyhurst.edu/facilities/cummings-art-gallery/

Mary Birdsong can be contacted at mBirdsong@ErieReader.com, and you can follow her on Twitter @Mary_Birdsong.



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MATHAM BASHA-AGHA

By: Matt Swanseger

Desirability is directly proportional to the lengths gone to obtain what is desired. For example, the distance between Erie and North East's Little Shop of Donuts is approximately 15 miles – hardly unmanageable, but not exactly convenient, either. Despite this, owners Pat and Jeana Skelly welcome out-of-towners most every day – proof they have formulated a product eminently desirable and, indeed, worth going out of one's way.

Just rolled out of bed? Looking for a reason not to immediately return there, to keep that listless heart of yours pumping another day? The Little Shop fry cake is a motivational speech for the taste buds: "Don't give up yet – at least not until you try all the flavors."

While you may balk at the idea of getting dressed at all, the fry cake dresses up with particular relish. Most anything fits its curves, and customers are encouraged to accessorize each donut gracing the runway. You can opt for a

conservative look (the "Yummy" tier, \$0.80 each/\$8.80 dozen – e.g., a powdered sugar "foundation"), something with a little more pizzazz (the "Tasty" tier, \$0.95 each/\$10.45 dozen – this adds a fruit icing made with real fruit puree), or clean out the closet with the "Delicious" tier (\$1.10 each/\$12.10 dozen – lets you reach into a jewelry box of crushed cookies and candies).

The fry cakes' wardrobe department is collaborative, with Pat, Jeana, their children (Donovan and Miah), and their employees all pitching in ideas. Popular year-round outfits include Rolling In The Dough (a robe of chocolate icing, a crown of eggless cookie dough), the Maple 5-0 (a maple icing shawl with bacon sequins), and the Donut of the Caribbean (an exotic banana icing sash with a feathery coconut boa). Seasonal and limited edition varieties are cycled in at least once a month – sometimes more for special events, such as the Wine Fest (a Concord grape-iced donut) and Cherry Fest (a cherry cheesecake donut). The

Patrick Skelly, 32, owner of Little Shop of Donuts in North East, Pennsylvania.

Skellys plan to debut an apple pie donut in November, followed by a candy cane donut in December.

"We brainstorm regularly," says Pat. "The inspiration comes from everywhere."

Initially, that inspiration originated with the designer donut revolution, a deep-fried renaissance that began in major coastal cities like New York (Dough) and Seattle (Top Pot) before sweeping inland over the last decade or so. The Skellys' operation most closely mirrors that of East Coast establishments Duck Donuts (Fayetteville, North Carolina) and Fractured Prune (Ocean City, Maryland), where batches of plain fry cakes are prepared throughout the day and customized by patrons. This format is friendlier to first-time business owners like the Skellys, as it has allowed them to concentrate on perfecting a single prototype. Overreaching one's abilities has proven the death knell to many fledgling businesses, a misstep the Skellys have skillfully avoided by specializing.

"Why do a bunch of things okay when you can do one thing really great?" Pat asks.

That one thing is neither too light nor too heavy, kissed gently with vanilla. The Skellys plan on upping that to two things with the introduction of a chocolate fry cake next year – another model, another realm of possibilities for fry cake fashion. The models may be well-composed by the time they reach the runway, but they are notoriously feisty when they're being made up.

"The batter is very finicky," Pat says. The

dough and ambient temperature have to be measured constantly. If they are not in sync, the consistency is thrown off and the little prima donuts don't cooperate so well. "That was by far the hardest thing to learn."

Startups involve their fair share of trial-and-error, but after four years of research and six months of operations,

The Little Shop fry cake is a motivational speech for the taste buds: "Don't give up yet – at least not until you try all the flavors."

the would-be laboratory technician and his veterinary technician wife have things under control. The small building Little Shop shares with a Laundromat at 36 West Main Street has become North East's magnetic pole during breakfast hours, with residents, Mercyhurst North East students, festival-goers, and outdoorsmen making a V-line for the counter before migrating outward.

As for Pat, he enjoys the fact that he doesn't have to go too far. "It's a two-minute walk." The greater distance has already been traveled. Now it's all about letting his stuff do the strutting.

Little Shop of Donuts, 36 W. Main St. (Rte. 20), North East, is open 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. weekdays (closed Wednesday) and 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. on weekends. Call ahead for large orders at 347.5586.

Matt Swanseger can be reached at mswanseger@eriereader.com. You can follow him on Twitter @SwazzySwagga or read his blog at squanderoza.com.



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A red Santa sack with a white fur trim is on the left. The background is a snowy rooftop with a blue sky. The STAR 104 logo is in a blue oval with a yellow border. The text "What's In Santa's Sack?" is in large, red, outlined letters.

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MUSIC REVIEWS

Maddock

It's Drowning Out
Self-released



The album begins with light sonic pings surrounded by a static haze. A few seconds later, the band cuts in with a heavy dance-rock groove. Maddock is a young trio right out of Erie that isn't afraid to experiment with fresh sounds. The guitar has a timbre I thought was outlawed in this city. The instrumentation is raw and angular, with a postpunk edge. Fuzz-soaked rumbles accentuate invitingly knock-kneed melodies. Sounds recall underly-lauded bands like Q And Not U or the Dismemberment Plan. Andrew Henderson's vocals are simultaneously vulnerable and aggressive, his nasal tenor at times gritty (in the classic-sounding "Underground Babe"), while at other times, tender (in the wonderful Cymbals Eat Guitars-esque tune "Stalagmites"). Lyrically, the band is far beyond their years, blending emotional forthrightness with clever wordplay. Any band that uses the phrase "histrionic badgering" in a chorus has my immediate attention ("Frequencies"). *It's Drowning Out* is the band's first full-length, and it's spectacular front to back. Be sure to keep an eye out for their next appearance at Basement Transmissions and beyond.



– Nick Warren

Weyes Blood

Front Row Seat To Earth
Kemado Records



Have you ever wished that Joni Mitchell sang for the Zombies? If so, this just might be the album for you. It begins like a vocal recital. Bathed in the echo of an empty concert hall, a simple piano arpeggio repeats, as Natalie Mering comes in. Mering, the central force of Weyes Blood, has a truly remarkable voice, her rich alto both breathy and strong, not unlike that of Florence Welch. The dark, dusty sounds of late 1960s rock and folk are readily present, while touches of modern production make it decidedly prescient. The outcome is a success, in the same modern-retro language of Angel Olsen, though with all playfulness shelved. There's an inescapable solemnity in Mering's voice. She has the deep, haunting mystery of Nico, with a trained musician's ability to control her instrument. By "Do You Need My Love," the album picks up ever so slightly, employing the jaunty, classical-inspired songwriting of late British psychedelia with nary a guitar in earshot. Tracks like "Seven Words" show an undeniable passion that hits the listener immediately.



– Nick Warren

American Wrestlers

Goodbye Terrible Youth
Fat Possum Records



Brilliant and wonderfully chimey, *Goodbye Terrible Youth* has a comforting sound. There's a 90s throw-back that mixes with the twee charm you'd get from high school covers of The Cure. This album follows up the band's spectacular 2015 eponymous debut. The St. Louis quartet picks up the tempo a little bit, with a steady finger-tapping rhythm from start to finish. The record is a perfect soundtrack for the fall season. There's just something about fuzzy lo-fi indie rock that pairs perfectly with autumn leaves and cardigans. The sound is freeing: Gary McClure's voice is high and soft a la Robert Schneider (the Apples in Stereo) or Doug Martsch (Built to Spill). Despite the cheerful sounding exterior, the lyrics make good on the album title's promise. Personal accounts are woven into bleak tales of growing up and coping with our modern age. Chorus-less songs go on, repeating melodies, but not repeating lyrics. The depths are there to visit when you need to, but the words linger, heavily obscured and distorted into a shoegaze lullaby.



– Nick Warren

Common

Black America Again
ARTium/Def Jam



Though the title of Common's 11th studio album may make some feel uneasy, *Black America Again* addresses many social issues that tie into one overall message: freedom. With production tailored to the Chicago native, Common protests oppression while tapping into the beauty of self. Kicking off this album with "Joy and Peace," the emcee briefly educates us on how true bliss derives from a supreme being beyond us. On the title track featuring the great Stevie Wonder, Common courageously clears a few stereotypes about African-Americans in hopes of understanding and equality. Though he touches on current racial scenarios, his vision is broad enough for everyone to be affected. On the idealistic "The Day Women Took Over," Common expresses a better nation under the authority of the almighty female. *BAA* is a conscious effort that beautifully blurs social commentary and self-empowerment making the listener look out into the world and within. It may not be an instant classic, but it's an awesome contribution to hip hop. Common gives us the soundtrack to today and the blueprint to a brighter tomorrow.



– Charles Brown

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Erie Faces Erie

Jamie & RJ Messenger

founders of Iron
Empire Clothing

Ed Bernik

photographer

"The important message is to not be afraid to take the leap. We just did it, both feet."

Ed Bernik: Why would somebody want to start a clothing line in Erie?

RJ Messenger: When we started, it was a fun hobby to keep us busy on the side. We both worked full-time jobs, just got married, bought a house – and it was one of those things: What do we do now to occupy our free time? So when we started the clothing line it wasn't to be our own bosses or become entrepreneurs. But I think someone should want to start a clothing line, in Erie or elsewhere, because there's so much you can do with this business: put your own ideas into the design, create a brand, or use it to inspire people through the messages.

Jamie Messenger: We definitely didn't intend it to be a "business" when we started but we're glad that it took us in that direction. You could ask "why" about any business. This was representative of us. We felt like we could really be a positive influence in the community, and the community for us.

EB: What's the theme of your clothing? What makes it unique?

RJM: I think our clothing stands out because there's meaning behind it, it's more than just clothing. It's a brand, a way of life, a mindset – with a lot of positivity. Some of our shirts just have a design or a

logo but the majority have a saying: something we came up with that might motivate or inspire others. We see a sense of pride in people wearing Iron Empire, because they might put on a shirt one day and feel like that shirt represents who they are and what they're about. Whether it's a saying like, "In myself I trust" or "My life, my way" or one of our longer sayings. People get a sense of pride in what the shirt says and represents, and they're proud of it being from Erie.

EB: Who is your clothing marketed to?

JM: We honestly love this question! Because we don't have a specific market. We want it to be for everyone. A lot of times people say, "I never stopped in before because I thought it was fitness clothing." It's really not, though it does fit that market. But as a whole, our aim is to be a lifestyle brand for anybody who wants to feel good about themselves or needs a little push to get through the day or be inspired.

EB: You've become a national brand. How do you promote yourselves outside of Erie?

RJM: We rely on social media for the majority of it. We have a large fan base through Facebook and especially Instagram. We're tagged and posted daily – all around the country people are wearing our clothing and tagging us, with, "I'm in the mountains on the West Coast" or "I'm in this forest," or "I'm in another country." We've got famous people wearing our stuff, and people tagging us saying, "This WWF wrestler was wearing your shirt in Rome." How awesome is that?! We also travel a lot around the country attending fitness events, expos where we meet hundred of thousands of people. At out-of-state events, they're meeting us and getting an idea of what the brand is about. We'll sell 50-75 shirts in an area where we've never been, and it just spreads like wildfire.

EB: You've seen tremendous growth in the last year. Do you see that as sustainable?

RJM: It's kind of like a runaway train. As long as we keep working and putting in the time, there's nothing that's going to stop the growth of it. Every week



there's something new, something different. It's all coming together at once. We saw this on TV: "This overnight success took 30 years of hard work." But we put so much in early on that it's almost like out of nowhere, we went from having a few shirts online to people around the country wearing them. It's been nonstop, and we're just trying to keep up with it now.

EB: You both seem so positive. Was there a time when you had doubts?

JM: There are nights when we're laying there saying, "Oh boy, what are we going to do, what did we get ourselves into?" But then it always works itself out because we're willing to work as hard as it takes. If we have to be here 18 hours a day to make it work, we're here 18 hours and happy to get home, have dinner, and spend some time with the dog. There's always going to be doubt – you're not truly an entrepreneur otherwise. But the important message is to not be afraid to take the leap. We just did it, both feet. We said, "We're going to commit to this. We're young and don't have any kids, and if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out – but hopefully it does."

EB: Any new ideas for the future that you're excited about?

RJM: We have a lot. It's almost like we're always working behind the scenes on something down the road. Right now, as far as the clothing and the store go, we're releasing our winter line, with a lot of new designs. We just locked in a big sponsorship with the Bayhawks – that's a first for us. And a sponsorship with the Otters.

EB: You guys also do a lot of community outreach besides your business.

It's kind of like a runaway train. As long as we keep working and putting in the time, there's nothing that's going to stop the growth of it.

JM: That's important to both of us. It's part of our core values: giving back and seeing a positive return. We're working on getting a program off the ground where kids do community service and in exchange they get a gym membership. Working out can be a positive influence, to get out some of that energy and be part of a bigger community. We've also done a lot of work with different charities. We're gearing up to do our clothing drive for the City Mission, which we also did last year. This year,

we want to do it a little bigger and better. Giving is so big and Erie needs it so much. It needs somebody who's not afraid to get in there, down to the nitty-gritty.

RJM: There's a saying from someone that I look up to on a professional level, Tony Robbins. He has a quote that hits me every single day, 'If you're not willing to give a dime out of a dollar, then you're not willing to give \$100,000 out of a million.' Many people say, "When I'm making \$500,000, then I'll donate to charities." But if you aren't willing in the beginning, you won't be down the road. So sometimes when we do well at an event, rather than paying off some of our bills, we'll go out to dinner and pay for another person's dinner. Anything like that, because we know how much that can mean to that person. We feel that because of the support we receive, we have to pay it back somehow, someway. If we do it now, then down the road when we're more successful, we'll be able to help a lot more people and help change their lives.

*Jamie and RJ Messenger:
ironempireclothing.com*

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