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# R ERIE READER

Jan. 2025 // Vol. 1 // ErieReader



With: Erie Apparel  
WQLN Public Broadcasting  
Life After the Big Storm  
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## From the Editor

### It's okay to love Erie

**E**rie has, historically, had a bit of a self-esteem problem. There is always that portion of the population that feels like Erie can just never seem to get it right.

But in the past decade or so, all the other Erieites have really gotten to work, flipping that script. Slogans like "It's okay to love Erie" started popping up on shirts, bumper stickers, and eventually, in the hearts and minds of the people who call this place home. And while our shift towards self-love has come from many sources, the branding campaigns of places like Erie Apparel, winner of 2024's Best Boutique, (its owners and staff pictured gorgeously on our cover this month by the talented Jessica Hunter) have hammered that idea home. It really *is* okay to love Erie — and to be vocal about that love, and to show your support for the people and places working to make Erie more lovable.

That sentiment couldn't be more appropriate for our issue this month: Best of Erie.

Many of you have taken the time out of your busy lives to show your love — by voting en masse for those people, places, and things that make Erie so great. The Best of Erie issue is always one we look forward to — a chance to give a proverbial pat on the back to those businesses working so hard, those folks putting their creative ideas on display, those places — both naturally occurring and human-made — that keep us coming back again and again. Those entities that make Erie a place we feel okay loving.

This month, our writers take that a step further. Liz Allen points out those people and places outside of identifiable categories that represent the best of Erie — advocacy groups helping those unhoused in Erie find regular, dependable warmth and comfort, and neighbors (and neighborhood groups) pitching in to help dig us all out of an unprecedented snowstorm. A new columnist, Edwina Capozziello highlights the kind of experience one can only have in Erie as she patronizes Urbaniak Brothers for the first time. Jonathan Burdick points out the best in public programming on WQLN — those faces, both human and puppet, who have, for generations, bolstered America's children's academic growth along with their (arguably more important) empathetic, social-emotional growth.

As we head into this new year, let's take a moment to celebrate that which makes us, as a community, unique. The folks, food, art, and experiences listed among these pages are just part of the story. What makes the Erie community so special are all the people who voted them there (psst... that's you). Thanks for collectively making Erie a place that feels (more than) okay to love.

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**Editor's Note**

*We write this Editor's Note in order to remedy any misunderstandings of the opinion column "Erie at Large: A Congressman and a State Senator Walk into a Bar," which originally appeared in the "News and Views" section of the July 13, 2022 edition.*

*An opinion column titled "Erie at Large: A Congressman and a State Senator Walk into a Bar," originally appeared in the "News and Views" section of the July 13, 2022 print edition of the Erie Reader. Sen. Laughlin has explained in a separate opinion piece published in the Erie Times-News on December 17, 2020, that the friend-of-the-court brief discussed in the column was not intended "to overturn a single vote" (<https://www.goerie.com/story/opinion/columns/2020/12/17/sen-dan-laughlin-gop-court-action-designed-defend-law/3902779001/>). The Erie Reader did not intend for any inference that might have been drawn otherwise. Specifically, we want to clarify that Senator Laughlin did not seek a pardon.*

## Catch Our Drift: The Best of Erie On Display

Erie proves resilient after the big storm

By: Liz Allen

The day after Thanksgiving, we cruised back to Erie from Maryland without so much as a traffic tie-up, only to drive our small SUV into a snow drift a block from home. Our other car, which my brother borrowed while we were away, also got stuck a block away in the opposite direction.

As we labored to shovel, push or rock our way out of disaster, I lost a boot in the snow and then hobbled home full of pity for my plight, because I couldn't even stomp my feet in frustration. Later, though, as I learned about the throngs of good-hearted people who stepped up to help the snowbound, I realized that while the ferocious blizzard highlighted Erie's weather at its worst, the storm also showed Erie at our best, as people and organizations scrambled to aid those in need.

Those who are homeless were fed and sheltered. A nonprofit raised money even though its fundraiser was canceled. Volunteers took in a record number of stranded travelers. New Americans weathered the storm.

Now, many of those same helpers are also brainstorming strategies to improve disaster responses down the road, including addressing climate resiliency. Here are some of their stories and lessons learned from the storm.

### Help for the homeless

"When that weather hit, we were very, very concerned about our folks out of the streets," said Barbara Lewis, a member of Voices of the Homeless Advocates, which formed two years ago and includes people who are unhoused. She and others have worried about the impact of big storms on the homeless. The blizzard the day after Thanksgiving proved that those worries were justified.

What if someone was trying to get from the Upper Room at 1024 Peach St., open during the day, to the new Community Resilience Center at 450 E. 16th St., which has overnight beds? Think about the difficulty of walking that route during a blizzard if you are elderly or suffer from physical or mental illness, she said. EMTA never

runs on Sundays and service was suspended for a time during the storm. "There was an elderly woman with one leg trying to wheel her walker," Lewis said.

The Homeless Advocates group has already met to discuss how to pick up people and take them to shelter during future big storms. "This is a stop-gap until we get through this winter," she said. They are also publicizing the Band app, where people can get weather alerts and information about which Erie agencies and shelters are open or closed. "It's really helpful to those providing services but not as helpful to people with lived experiences of being homeless," Lewis explained. Those who are unhoused may not have enough data available on their phones to access the app, she said.

Still, the free Band app is a welcome step forward to improve communication, according to Cris Taylor, retired director of the Upper Room who now chairs the Client Services Committee of the Erie County HOME team, which works on homelessness. "Everybody recognizes that there has to be a way to say there's a winter storm — where are the shelters? What are the transportation vehicles where you can be picked up or dropped off?"

The committee's next task is to create and advocate for a disaster plan. "People who are homeless have limited resources to evacuate, stockpile food, store medications, and shelter in place," according to Taylor's preliminary outline for the disaster plan. "To ensure efficiency and maximize the quality of services available to homeless people during a disaster, it is critical that service providers build relationships with the relevant stakeholders involved in the emergency response process," the proposal states. Disaster planning will address any kind of catastrophic event, not just blizzards, and is needed countywide, he said.

To learn more and to share ideas, plan to attend the next Client Services meeting on Friday, Jan. 10, at 10 a.m. at the Mental Health Association of Northwestern Pennsylvania, 1101 Peach St.



A wreath in Perry Square honors the lives of 24 homeless Erie residents who died in 2024. A memorial service was held on Dec. 20.

### Generosity rules

Community of Caring, started by the late Mother Mary Beth Kennedy and the Rev. Charles Kennedy 43 years ago, serves men and women who are chronically homeless by providing overnight shelter, meals, and case management.

Maureen Flaherty Dunn, director of development, was thrilled when parishioners at St. Andrew Catholic Church, 1116 W. Seventh St., decided to donate all free-will offerings from the church's second annual Christmas concert to Community of Caring. Dunn graduated from St. Andrew School, grew up down the street from

the church and cherished her church community.

The Dec. 8 concert with Dave Van Amburg's V Band promised to be a big hit, like the first concert in 2023. But when organizers canceled the concert because the parking lot was inaccessible and utilities were out, Dunn didn't panic. Rather, advance promotions and personal invitations to a mailing list of 800 prompted people to donate anyhow.

"Dave Van Amburg (also a St. Andrew's alum) promoted it constantly and has an amazing following," she said. "We did receive checks in the mail from people who are not our



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The EverGIVE Tree at Blasco Library awaits more donations of hats, gloves, mittens, and scarves. The items are available for free for library patrons. Library staffers and their families also keep a basket at the circulation desk filled with items for patrons in need.

usual donors," she said. "Our needs continue through all seasons as we constantly have new people come to the shelter. We shelter, feed and clothe all year long."

Donations can be mailed to Community of Caring, 245 E. Eighth St., Erie, PA 16503 or by visiting the website, [www.cocerie.org](http://www.cocerie.org).

**Newcomers adjust**

Erie people are used to surviving brutal winters, but what about those for whom this is new terrain? Fortunately, Erie's refugees and immigrants managed pretty well during the storm, according to Gretchen Fairley, development associate for the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants at the International Institute.

"There really weren't any dramatic or heroic stories," she said. "Case managers all had essentially the same accounts: that our clients were okay through the storm. Everyone had heat, food, and water," she said. Some assistance was needed with communication, though.

The caseworkers "had to check in with everyone to let them know that schools were closed and workplaces were closed, that they should not try to go to their jobs or try to meet a bus or van driver for their jobs and let them know that they would not be in trouble for missing work and their kids would not be in trouble for missing school," Fairley said.

Some refugees were scared or surprised by the power of the storm, of

course. Others enjoyed the novelty. But overall, she felt "this illustrates that refugees are like everyone else in Erie, except that they haven't had the experience to understand how a winter storm can require different behaviors and actions to stay safe."

The USCRI continues to serve newly arrived refugees who have fled war, violence, and persecution.

"What was true for those arriving yesterday is still true of those arriving today and tomorrow, the ability to overcome the challenges of becoming a newcomer, and ultimately, to give back to their new country," Dylanna Grasinger, USCRI vice president for refugee programs in Erie, said in a holiday email.

To learn more and to donate, visit [refugees.org](http://refugees.org).

**The road not traveled**

While refugees and immigrants strive to make a go of it in Erie far from their original homes, a large number of recent visitors ended up here by chance due to the blizzard.

Fairfield Hose Co. Fire Chief Jim Hawryliw in Harborcreek Township said the volunteer fire department has served as a temporary shelter on occasion, but usually for only 10 to 15 people. During the blizzard, close to 100 people were transported to the fire hall's new food-catering hall on East Lake Road after their vehicles got stuck on Interstate 90.

The Pennsylvania State Police had asked Fairfield and volunteer firefighters in North East to offer temporary shelter, he said, and the Erie County Red Cross offered resources, too. "Every inch of the club was filled with people," he said. Volunteer firefighters and their families helped travelers from Canada to Texas and from the East Coast to the West Coast, he said. "We made a lot of new friends."

Sue Hanson, a member of the Harborcreek Township Community Engagement Team, who was delighted to see how East County people came together to help out strangers. She owns Expressions Salon and Spa, close to the fire hall, in a former apartment with a full bath. She was able to offer her business for showers for weary travelers, many of whom didn't even have a change of clothes, and washed lots of blankets.

Now she and Chief Hawryliw are working with others to devise a plan for future disasters. There are two immediate needs — finding new cots to replace the Vietnam-era ones used for the temporary shelter and locating a donated storage facility to keep the cots and other supplies. The idea, she said, is to fundraise and/or seek grants to get new cots and supplies. Perishable items would later be donated to the community and replenished with new items every year, she said.

Keep your eye on the township website at [www.harborcreek.org](http://www.harborcreek.org) to stay informed as fundraising plans are developed.

**Dig these ideas**

We would have been snowbound for a week without neighborhood helpers. A young couple from Colorado pushed our SUV out of deep ruts so we could drive it to the plowed-out driveway of my friend Theresa Power-Natale down the block. Later, Theresa flagged down the father-and-son owners of a plow business who snow-blowed most of our driveway. The new next-door neighbors, teachers who share our driveway, finished the job, while a couple hoping to earn extra money for Christmas gifts for their kids dug out our other car at a reasonable price.

Too many people in Erie don't have the physical ability to shovel their sidewalks, let alone dig out vehicles

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buried in the snow. That's why it's good to learn that Our West Bayfront staff and residents are sharing ideas on "how we can better serve our community and how neighbors can help neighbors," said Gretchen Kerr, executive director.

"Generally, we have been discussing ways that students, faculty, and staff at Gannon who live near or on campus could be helpful in snow emergencies," she said. "Also, we are exploring if there are opportunities to work with local organizations and businesses that have plowed, off-street parking that could accommodate temporary parking to clear the streets."

Our West Bayfront also wants to enlist individual block leaders to serve as communicators during emergencies, and the organization may purchase snow-removal equipment for neighbors to borrow, she said.

Meanwhile, staffers in the City of Erie's department of Planning and Neighborhood Resources took on new roles during the snow emergency, volunteering through United Way of Erie County's 211 Helpline to deliver meals and medicines and to dig people out. "We weren't asked. We took it upon

ourselves," said Jackie Spry, department director.

She is also the staffer working with the city's new Environmental Advisory Council (EAC), which is seeking associate members as they develop a climate action plan for Erie. That should

two college students, and three environmental experts. You don't have to be a City of Erie resident to apply but you must commit to attending EAC's monthly meetings at 3 p.m. on the fourth Wednesday of the month in City Council chambers. To apply,

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**"People who are homeless have limited resources to evacuate, stockpile food, store medications, and shelter in place. To ensure efficiency and maximize the quality of services available to homeless people during a disaster, it is critical that service providers build relationships with the relevant stakeholders involved in the emergency response process."**

**— Disaster plan outline drafted by Erie County HOME Team**

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be a top priority now that we can see the consequences of extreme weather right here at home.

The EAC's bylaws provide for up to seven associate members to be added — two high school students,

email Spry at [jspry@erie.pa.us](mailto:jspry@erie.pa.us).

Of course, after thinking about the months of wintry weather that lie ahead, it's also nice to escape reality and curl up with a good book. The

Erie County Library has just the right incentive, with its "Blizzard of Books" winter reading challenge through Jan. 31. Learn more on the library's homepage at [erielibrary.org](http://erielibrary.org).

When you visit Blasco, consider donating scarves, hats, mittens or gloves to hang on the "EverGIVE" tree near the front desk. Alyssa Johnson, the library's communications coordinator, and Zara Ostrander, the new children's librarian, came up with the idea for the tree to supplement the basket of winter gear (including blankets) that staffers keep at the front desk, according to Jessica Spitulski, the library's director.

"The tree looks festive and people can anonymously donate or pull from the tree," said Spitulski. The inspiration for the tree and the winter reading challenge comes from the children's book *The Mitten*, by Jan Brett, which is based on a Ukrainian folktale about a white mitten lost and then found in the snow. I can relate, now that my sainted husband has excavated my missing left boot from a big mound of snow.

*Liz Allen can be reached at [lizerie@aol.com](mailto:lizerie@aol.com).*

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**LECOM** HEALTH



## “Shame Must Change Sides”

Political power, sexual violence, and the continued fight for justice

By: Susannah Faulkner

This month, we will, together as a nation, witness the transition of power of our executive branch to President-Elect Donald Trump, who was found liable for sexually abusing and defaming advice columnist E. Jean Carroll in a civil case. Should we be surprised? This is the same man who boasted on camera about groping women without consent.

A metaphor does not exist to encompass the rage and fear I felt on election night. The stark reality of, yet again, being disappointed by our society for electing this person was harrowing. “Not again,” I repeated to myself for two days straight.

The relationship between political figures and sexual violence is complex, as these individuals often wield significant power that can silence or intimidate victims. Our president-elect is far from alone in these matters.

Closer to home, the case of Erie County Executive Brenton Davis and his accusations of abuse have stirred distrust and tension within local government. While allegations of intimidation and threats were made, the legal system ultimately ruled in his favor, signaling a continued failure to protect victims when the accused holds power. Such cases reveal the culture of impunity that often surrounds individuals in political positions, and they emphasize the need for systemic reforms that ensure accountability, regardless of a person’s political status or influence.

The brave woman who came forward in the Davis case asserted that she didn’t seek assistance from the police or medical professionals because she was afraid. I know the feeling all too well. On the night of Dec. 23, 2010, I was raped in Millcreek Township by an acquaintance while home on winter break from college. Genuinely fearing for my life, I kicked and pushed my way away from him and ran to my car. In the shock of the frigid air, I quickly asked myself if going to the police station was worth it.

I knew the statistics — instead, I drove home and numbed the pain for



When men who are accused and/or found liable for sexual assault or violence against women are in positions of power in our country — their behavior is, at best, overlooked and, at worst, emulated. In the now famous words of Gisèle Pelicot, the shame of sexual assault “must change sides.”

a decade.

The numbers that flashed through my mind remain staggering to this day, and they spotlight the need for continued cultural and legislative reforms. According to RAINN (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network), an American is sexually assaulted every 68 seconds, and every 9 minutes, the victim is a child. These crimes are often committed by a familiar face, with more than 80 percent being someone the victim knows. According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission in a 2021 report, 94 percent of sexual abuse offenders are men. Disturbingly, only about 2.5 percent of sexual assault perpetrators face prison time — highlighting a significant gap in justice. These figures underscore not just the frequency of sexual violence but also the deeply embedded societal and institutional barriers to holding perpetrators accountable.

Moreover, the emotional toll on survivors of sexual violence is severe. RAINN reports that approximately 94 percent of women who survive rape experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms immediately after the assault. The pervasive nature of sexual violence is evident in these numbers, and it speaks to the critical need for comprehensive support systems for victims, as well as stronger societal and legal mechanisms to address this violence at every level.

The growing awareness of the systemic nature of sexual violence, particularly when committed by individuals in power, stresses the complexities of justice, accountability, and healing. It has been quite a dichotomy the past two months as a survivor to both reckon with the election as well as follow the public trial of Gisèle Pelicot in France.

Pelicot’s trial in which her ex-hus-

band Dominique Pelicot and his 49 co-defendants were convicted of sexually assaulting her over a span of nearly 10 years, stands as a pivotal moment in this fight against sexual violence. Pelicot’s brave decision to bring her abusers to court was not only a personal victory but also a call for societal reckoning. By publicly sharing the horrific details of her abuse and the manipulation that allowed it to continue, Pelicot ensured that her story was not just a private tragedy but a public indictment of a culture that often turns a blind eye to sexual violence, especially when committed by men in positions of power. Her words, “I wanted all of society to be a witness,” encapsulated a desire for systemic change — a push for greater accountability and awareness of sexual violence as a deeply rooted issue that must be confronted at all levels.

Pelicot’s abusers were not just her



## NEWS & OPINION

vintimate partners but also figures who wielded power over her, demonstrating how sexual violence is often perpetuated by those in positions of authority. As prominent figures, these abusers' actions speak to the broader problem of sexual violence within institutions of power — a problem that continues to affect numerous spheres, from local governments to the highest offices of the land.

Justice for survivors is crucial for emotional healing and for restoring trust in legal and political systems. In a broader societal context, holding offenders accountable creates a deterrent effect, potentially preventing future violence and encouraging others to report incidents of abuse. Accountability fosters a cultural shift that rejects the normalization of sexual violence, contributing to safer communities and stronger social norms around consent and respect.

During my time on Erie City Council in 2023, I served as Public Safety Liaison, having the duty of working closely with the Erie Police Department. At the end-of-year crime statistic review and public release, all types of crime were down except one.

It was rape and sexual assault.

More investments can be quickly deployed locally to flip the script, like public policies to reduce sexual violence that focus on prevention, support for victims, and accountability for offenders. Effective programs in-

clude comprehensive sex education that emphasizes consent, improved reporting systems for victims, stronger laws with clear penalties for sexual offenses, and funding for victim support services such as those provided at our Crime Victim Center.

On the national stage, the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) could further strengthen legal protections for women, ensuring that sexual violence is addressed through a framework of equality under the law. President Biden could leave a profoundly positive legacy by taking swift action to address this heinous societal norm.

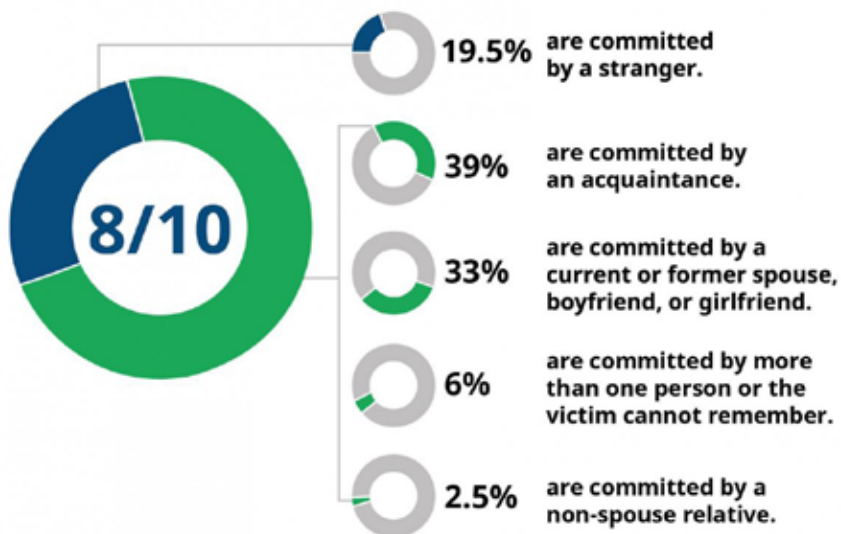
The cultural shift from silence to action holds promise for change, as it empowers survivors, demands accountability, and shifts the shame back on the shameful. Through public trials, stronger legal frameworks, and community support, society can begin to dismantle the structures that enable sexual violence, ensuring that perpetrators in all spheres of life, including politics, are brought to justice.

*Susannah Faulkner can be reached at [susannah.faulkner@gmail.com](mailto:susannah.faulkner@gmail.com).*

*A counselor from the Crime Victim Center is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 814-455-9414. If you are out of the calling area, you can reach someone toll free at 800-352-7273.*

*Learn more at [cvcerie.org](http://cvcerie.org).*

### 8 OUT OF 10 RAPES ARE COMMITTED BY SOMEONE KNOWN TO THE VICTIM



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# How to Get to *Sesame Street*: The History and Future of Public Television

Despite touching lives beyond count, value of children's programming still needs spelled out

By: Jonathan Burdick

**M**ove over *Breaking Bad*. Sorry *Sopranos*. I still love you, Lucy. But if you ask me my opinion on the greatest television shows of all time? It's a toss-up between *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* and *Sesame Street*.

These two publicly broadcast shows were already well-established by the time I was born. Even at an early age, I understood that there was something different about them, something that made them stand out from shows on ABC's primetime TGIF block or the fun and memorable (but mostly mindless) Saturday morning cartoons.

Entering adulthood, as I better understood the differences between commercial and public broadcasting, the mythologies surrounding these two childhood shows and their creation were even more fascinating to me. Books like *The Good Neighbor* by Maxwell King, *Street Gang* by Michael Davis, and *Jim Henson* by Brian Jay Jones provided me with a deeper appreciation for the determination, grit, and genius that went into these productions — as well as the constant battles over funding with those diametrically opposed to the entire notion of public broadcasting.

As early as 1925 with the formation of the Association of College and University Broadcasting Stations (later renamed the National Association of Educational Broadcasters), there was a push for non-commercial educational radio stations, a concept supported by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) following its formation in 1934.

Fast-forward to the television era and the idea expanded to this new medium with the establishment of National Educational Television (NET). In 1962, President John F. Kennedy signed the Educational Television Facilities Act into law, which provided much-needed federal funding, while President Lyndon B. Johnson solidified such support with his signing of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, which established the Corporation of Public Broadcasting. A major challenge though: funding decisions would be made on a year-by-year basis.

Many in power were downright skeptical that public broadcasting could (or even should) compete against the big three corporate networks of ABC, CBS, and NBC. Of course, many others disagreed. This included a 39-year-old ordained minister and children's television host in Pittsburgh named Fred Rogers.

## Mr. Rogers goes national

The first episode of *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* aired on NET on Feb. 19, 1968 — a year before the incorporation of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Fred Rogers, who had studied music at Rollins College, had already made a name for himself with

CHARLOTTE BROOKS, 1970 - LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Alongside Big Bird, Oscar the Grouch, Ernie and Bert, Kermit the Frog, and Cookie Monster were the original four human characters: Gordon, Susan, Bob, and Mr. Hooper — the *Erie Daily Times* called *Sesame Street* “a forerunner of improved television in the years to come” with “the most naturally integrated show on the air.”

small-market shows such as *Children's Corner*. He was known for the soft-spoken, yet “disarmingly candid” way in which he explained life's happenings to kids. The *Erie Daily Times* described him as having a “mind that understands the special world of children and their environment.”

To play and use one's imagination, Rogers believed, was essentially a child's job. “They are preparing to understand [the world],” Rogers told the Pittsburgh Press. “Their make-believe friends are very real to them. The TV show or the person must be in tune with them, in harmony.”

Rogers' initial deal with NET included 130 half-hour episodes produced by Pittsburgh's WQED. His goal for the show, he said, was to create “an atmosphere in which a child is accepted and allowed to grow.” He believed that this was lacking in most children's programming.

“I think that the drama comes from within for all of us,” explained Rogers at the time. “And if we deal on the air in a healthy way with the themes of the drama children deal with in their own growing, then the drama is established. You don't need a very flashy display.”





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Erie Daily Times columnist Ron Wasielewski viewed an advanced screening of the show. Erie's Channel 54, operating as WQLN ("We Question and Learn") since August 1967, was looking to secure local funding to add it to its lineup.

"It is perhaps the first children's show outside of *Captain Kangaroo* that is really worthwhile and meaningful to children," Wasielewski wrote. Mr. Rogers looked at and talked directly to the camera, to the child watching. He sang songs. He told stories. He talked about kindness. He discussed feelings and fears and changes that children might experience. When the show entered the Neighborhood of Make-Believe by trolley (deliberately separate from the house), they would have imaginary adventures involving puppets, play, and problem-solving.

"Rogers tries to instill in [children] a sense of inner worth and self-confidence that will help them through 'stress situations,'" *Parade* magazine explained.

"We don't superimpose our own ideas upon them," emphasized Rogers. "We treat them with respect, because they are individuals who are growing up."

Despite making a career out of it, Rogers himself was always skeptical of television. During this decade, preschool-age children were watching over 50 hours of television a week — an era in which half of the country's school districts lacked even kindergartens, let alone preschools. Rogers often said he'd be pleased if children were outside playing rather than watching his show. "I say, 'Great!'" he exclaimed. "Sometimes I feel guilty about adding another show to television fare, but I know that if my program weren't there, something else would be."

### Mr. Rogers goes to Washington

In May 1969, Fred Rogers found himself in front of the Senate Subcommittee on Communications. President Richard Nixon, newly inaugurated, had desired to cut President Johnson's proposed federal funding for public broadcasting in half. With his heart on his sleeve, Rogers calmly and passionately made his case for educational television. He used his show to highlight its value.

"We deal with such things as getting a haircut, or the feelings about brothers and sisters, and the kind of anger that arises in simple family situations," elaborated Rogers. "I feel that if we in public television can only make it clear that feelings are mentionable and manageable, we will have done a great service for mental health."

"Well, I'm supposed to be a pretty tough guy and this is the first time I've had goosebumps for the last two days," Senator John Pastore responded.

"I'm grateful," continued Rogers, "not only for your goosebumps, but for your interest in our kind of communication." He then recited the lyrics to a song that he wrote about how to deal with anger. It worked. The initial federal funding was secured — at least for the time being.

Meanwhile in Erie, local media made it clear how impressed they were with the quality of WQLN's offerings. The Erie Daily Times editors called the "quality of entertainment" on the station as "almost

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In May of 1969, Fred Rogers gave his famous speech advocating for public television to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Communications. In it, he expressed how important his program is to teach children about emotional health, dealing with hard feelings like anger and jealousy, and providing encouragement for children to be themselves.

unbelievable."

"Yes, we mean entertainment," they elaborated. "The fact that viewers will also be educated and/or culturally enriched in the process should not deter anyone from turning to [Channel] 54 on what may be becoming less and less an idiot box or boob tube."

They also commended the support from Erie's commercial television affiliates — WSEE 35, WJET 24, and WICU 12 — who did not view WQLN resentfully as competition and had even helped promote WQLN on their stations.

### A new neighborhood on public television

That summer, Apollo 11 landed on the moon. Woodstock celebrated peace and music for three days in Bethel, New York, while opposition to the Vietnam War intensified across the nation. On network television *Scooby-Doo*, *Where Are You!* and *The Brady Bunch* premiered, while radio stations played new music from The Beatles' *Abbey Road* and Led Zeppelin's second album.

It was during these turbulent times that there was significant hype surrounding the premiere of an upcoming children's show: *Sesame Street*. The program was referred to as a 130-hour preschool course airing every weekday for 26 weeks for non-commercial television. It had a budget of \$8 million funded by numerous sources including the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, the Corporation For Public Broadcasting, and the U.S. Office of Education.

*Sesame Street* was masterminded by Joan Ganz Cooney, who'd been working on the idea since 1966 and founded the Children's Television Workshop in 1968. That was also the year she met a "bearded,

prophetic figure in sandals" who entered one of their meetings and sat quiet and expressionless in the back of the room: Jim Henson. While she didn't initially recognize him, she certainly knew his Muppets, known for *Sam & Friends*, their chaotic commercials, and memorable appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Once Henson was on board — bringing collaborators Frank Oz and Carol Spinney with him — he was given significant creative freedom to create the show's now iconic Muppet characters while also creating many of the experimental videos which played memorably between segments.

"One needn't be an expert on education, or even children, to know when a production feels right or when it has the clear stamp of know-how as well as having its heart in the right place," a UPI journalist wrote following an advanced screening. "This gentle, witty series ... has the sound and feel of people who love children — and not those whose idea is to exploit them." Its blend of people and puppets, he added, created "with remarkable speed and ease, a sense of neighborhood."

Alongside Big Bird, Oscar the Grouch, Ernie and Bert, Kermit the Frog, and Cookie Monster were the original four human characters: Gordon, Susan, Bob, and Mr. Hooper. First season guests included celebrities such as James Earl Jones, Harry Belafonte, Jackie Robinson, Carol Burnett, and Dick Van Dyke.

"This could well be the hottest children's show on the tube," predicted the Erie Daily Times, calling the show "unprecedented" and a "bold experiment." The first episode aired on Nov. 10, 1969. Local media continued their praise. "The biggest hit in television this year can be found on none of the commercial



Puppeteer Jim Henson has created several new Muppets, including Bert (left) and Ernie (right), to help Muppet regulars teach kids their ABCs on TV.

Described upon first impression as a “bearded, prophetic figure in sandals,” Jim Henson and his Muppets were the key component to making the show *Sesame Street* resonate so well with children. The publicly broadcast show seeks to show children love, educational content, and social emotional skills – and stands out among other commercialized programming.

television channels but instead on Channel 54,” proclaimed columnist Ed Mathews.

Not everybody wanted to hang out on *Sesame Street* though. The British Broadcasting Corporation refused to air the show in the United Kingdom. Monica Sims, head of children’s programming for BBC, feared the show had “authoritarian aims” and disliked its “middle-class attitudes” and American slang. The show, she alleged, sounded like “indoctrination and a dangerous use of television.”

Linguists criticized the dialect. Segregationists slammed its integrated cast. Fiscal conservatives seethed over its use of tax dollars. The feminist National Organization for Women took issue with its depiction of women, particularly in its submissive portrayal of Susan. Educational leaders attacked it as having “little of educational value.” One critic claimed to have met a 3-year-old *Sesame Street* fan who could recite her ABCs, but wasn’t potty trained. “This is an extreme but relevant illustration of the potential harm done by the hard-sell of *Sesame Street*,” he claimed.

An influential Cornell professor argued that the show didn’t properly portray the realities of inner-city life. “[T]here are no cross words, no conflicts, no difficulties, nor, for that matter, any obligations or visible attachments,” he said. “The old, the ugly or the unwanted is simply made to disappear through a manhole.” When another prominent professor called the show an “educational mirage,” a professor who’d advised on *Sesame Street* pushed back, calling

such criticisms a “tiresome assertion” by someone “who feels he knows the one best way to teach kids.”

Many others defended *Sesame Street* too. Its pacing, its repetition, its zaniness, and the weirdness of some of the segments were all the point. “*Sesame Street* isn’t perfect,” published *LIFE* magazine. “It isn’t a substitute for day-care programs, Head Start, open schools, enriched environments, [or] social justice. ... [B]ut ‘indoctrinating’ children with the alphabet and numbers isn’t immoral.”

*New York Magazine* agreed. It wasn’t “the ultimate perfection of education via television,” but due to its experimental nature, it would be able to “refine its offerings, reinforce what turns out to be successful and drop what is not.” The show could adapt, evolve, and improve each season.

They further defended the show from critiques by both sides of the political spectrum. Conservatives blasted the show as too progressive while leftists accused it of being “just one more effort to make youngsters the slaves of the middle-class system of schooling for a life of bourgeois imprisonment.”

“It faces constant admonition by conservatives that it is too radical, and by radicals that it is too conservative,” continued the authors. “More often than not these critics substitute their own feelings for those of their children.”

Erie resident Sandra Lenard penned a letter stating that she believed much of the *Sesame Street* criticism simply came from narrow-minded individuals. “Perhaps I am being too suspicious, but I have an un-

easy feeling that this is all a big smoke screen to hide their real objection to *Sesame Street*,” she wrote, “which is that the program features black people in starring roles.”

The Erie Daily Times called *Sesame Street* “a forerunner of improved television in the years to come” with “the most naturally integrated show on the air.”

*LIFE* magazine added that *Sesame Street*’s creators clearly didn’t plan to “employ those children as pawns in an ideological chess game” like some critics. “It is a modest and amusing step in the ‘right’ direction,” they said. “[T]elevision for children that neither bores them to distraction nor clubs them in sensibility.”

### ***Sesame Street* finds its groove**

Over the next few years, *Sesame Street* adapted, evolved, and improved significantly, largely due to not avoiding legitimate criticism. Instead, they learned from it. After scathing criticism over its lack of authentic Hispanic representation, for instance, the show introduced Luis and Maria, who became two of the show’s most beloved human characters. The Muppets and people also began interacting more and the street became more vibrant and alive.

Many of the early *Sesame Street* sketches were instantly iconic: there was Kermit and Joey singing the alphabet, Bert telling Ernie he has a banana in his ear, and the Yip Yip martians discovering a telephone. There were unforgettable songs like Kermit’s “Bein’ Green,” Ernie’s “I Don’t Want to Live on the Moon,” Oscar’s “I Love Trash,” and Cookie Monster’s absolute banger “C is for Cookie.”

Just as with *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*, there were the more serious moments too. The most memorable of these followed the death of actor Will Lee in December 1982. Lee played Mr. Hooper, the show’s beloved grocer, and producers considered their options, even briefly considering having the character retire to Florida. “[W]e felt we ought to deal with it head-on,” executive producer Dulcy Singer told *The New York Times* before the episode addressing his death aired. “If we left it unsaid, kids would notice. Our instincts told us to be honest and straightforward.”

It made for one of the show’s most compelling and challenging episodes. Titled “Farewell, Mr. Hooper,” Big Bird learns that death is irreversible and that he will never see his friend again. It’s a moment handled softly and patiently, but also directly as the human characters talk Bird Big through his confusion, grief, and anger towards acceptance and understanding.

“I think it was probably one of the best things that we ever did,” reflected Big Bird performer Carroll Spinney years later, saying that what aired was their very first take. “The emotion was so written into the [script] that the tears were real.”

### **The future of public broadcasting**

Public broadcasting has had and continues to have its challenges and challengers. From the start, word-of-mouth lies about *Sesame Street*, for instance, spread such as that the show used vulgar language or that it portrayed children without clothes. Erie’s





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state senator, William G. Sesler, was one of Pennsylvania's politicians who pushed back against such misinformation and consistently fought for state funding for public broadcasting dollars when it turned into a political battle.

On a national level, the Nixon administration was a continuous adversary, while the following decade's Reagan administration slashed tens of millions designated for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Meanwhile, kids programming in the 1980s outside of public television became increasingly commercialized and, while remembered fondly by many who grew up in the era (yes, I still love you, *Ninja Turtles*), such shows served not to educate, but as a mechanism for selling toys, t-shirts, and video games.

"Give up on public broadcasting," economist Reed Irvine wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1986, arguing that there was too much bias from PBS and that the private sector could "adequately supply the public's appetite" for such shows. "The advent of cable, back-yard dishes, and videocassettes has radically increased the availability of news, entertainment and educational programs to the general public. ... [T]he time is ripe to ... defund the left-wing bureaucracy that has made public broadcasting its private playpen."

In the decades since, the political battles have continued, but today, the legacy of Mr. Rogers lives on through Fred Rogers Productions, which produces shows for PBS such as *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*,

*Peg + Cat*, *Odd Squad*, *Donkey Hodie*, and *Alma's Way*. Still, as *Variety* pointed out in their ranking of Mr. Rogers as one of the top 100 greatest shows ever, there's really never been anyone else quite like the man. "[An]d we're poorer for it," expressed the editors.

As for *Sesame Street* (which missed *Variety's* top ten by only one spot with its over 4,700 episodes), their trajectory in more recent years has been far more complicated, usually commercial-friendly pivots related to funding issues. Consumer advocate Ralph Nader, for example, was livid when the show accepted a \$1 million sponsorship from Discovery Zone in 1998. "That is exploiting impressionable children," he said, adding that the 15-second advertisement for a corporate chain before each episode broke with the spirit of non-commercial television and they ought to change the show's name to *Huckster Alley*. The producers responded that it was necessary due to cuts in funding to PBS, which had at the time eliminated \$3 million in annual funding for *Sesame Street*.

Then there was, of course, the controversial partnership with premium channel HBO in 2015, described by *The New Yorker's* Jill Lepore as "a staggering betrayal of the spirit of the show's founding philosophy." While Sesame Workshop maintained creative control, the deal gave HBO exclusive rights to air and stream new episodes for a nine-month window before being aired on PBS. In December

2024, HBO announced it would not renew the deal for 2025, leaving the prospect of future *Sesame Street* productions uncertain.

There is no question that public broadcasting has plenty of challenges ahead. There are still the usual funding issues, but also many people in positions of political power vocally calling to cease all funding to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Then there is the added challenge of adapting to the new media landscape. Erie's WQLN (winner of 2024's Best of Erie in Production Company and Best Filmmaker) continues to lead the way though, distributing as well as creating their own educational programs, free to access on television and online, including the award-winning Erie-centric historical docuseries *Chronicles* (2024 winner of Best Filmmaker), programs like *Erie Eats* and *Our Town*, and even podcasts such as *Next 2.0* with Marcus Atkinson and *We Question & Learn* with Tom Pysz.

"Who we are in the present includes who we were in the past," Mr. Rogers once said. While the future is unclear, for those of us who grew up watching *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, *Sesame Street*, and countless other shows on PBS, it's important for us to remember and share how these publicly broadcast shows from our past played a part in shaping us into who we are today.

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

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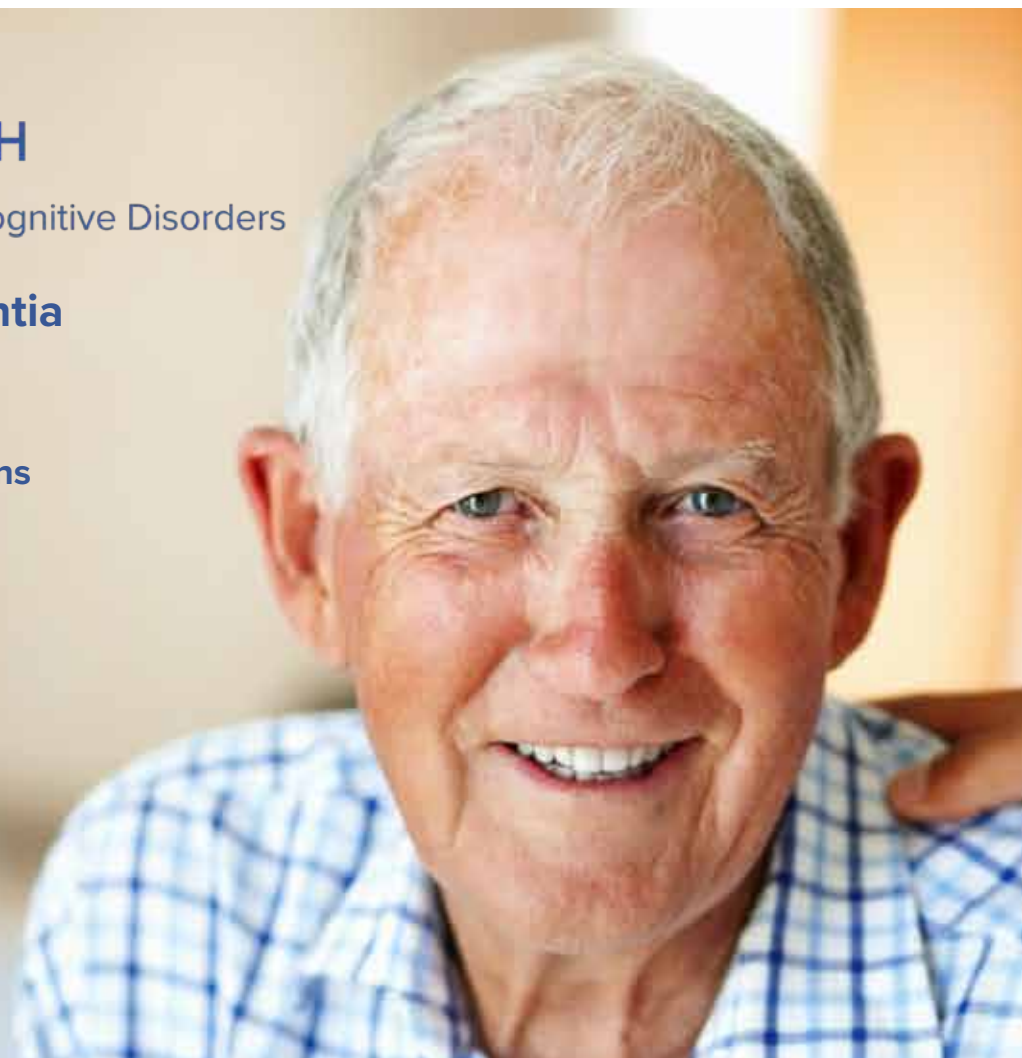
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# Best of Erie Winners and Finalists 2024

All your favorite people, places, things, and events in Erie

By: Erie Reader Staff

You're simply the best — better than all the rest.

You've done it again Erie — for 11 years running, the Erie Reader has fielded hundreds of thousands of crowdsourced votes from you, telling us who you think should be deemed the best. The best businesses, people, organizations, artists, restaurants, products, places to visit, adventures to have, experts to hire, etc. — you chose the best in Erie and we're so happy to give these winners their moment in the spotlight.

Every year we celebrate those who always sweep their individual categories, those who have upset some long-standing winners, and those newcomers (like in Best New Business, Best New Restaurant, Best New Band, etc.) who have gone through the harrowing experience of putting themselves out there, investing in an idea, or using their creative talents to make Erie more interesting. Simply, they're the best.

And so, without further ado, here they are: the winners and runners-up of Best of Erie 2024, chosen by you. Congratulations!

JESSICA HUNTER



Chefs Adam Williams (left) and Dan Kern (right) of Bar Ronin, winner of Best Restaurant 2024; runner-up for Best Chef, Best Burger, and Best Sushi

## GOODS AND SERVICES

### Best Local Business

**Winner: Werner Books and Coffee**

Runners-up: Romolo Chocolates, Bro-Man's Sammiches

### Best New Business (Within Last Two Years)

**Winner: Werner Books and Coffee**

Runners-up: Bakery on 5th, 5 Iron Golf

### Best Locally Made Product

**Winner: Smith's Hot Dogs**

Runners-up: Romolo Chocolates, Mighty Fine Donuts

### Best Car Dealership

**Winner: Bianchi Honda**

Runners-up: New Motors Subaru / VW / BMW, Auto Express Superstore

### Best Bank

**Winner: Erie Federal Credit Union**

Runners-up: PNC Bank, Northwest Savings Bank

### Best Antique Shop

**Winner: Copper Carriage**

Runners-up: Oregon Antiques, The Dollhouse at Pointe Fouré Vintage Boutique

### Best Boutique

**Winner: Erie Apparel**

Runners-up: Grasshopper, Glass Growers Gallery

### Best Jewelry Store

**Winner: Dahlkemper's Jewelry Connection**

Runners-up: Dempsey & Baxter, Sacred Piercing

### Best Furniture Store

**Winner: John V. Schultz Furniture & Mattress**

Runners-up: Arthur F. Schultz Company, Lake Erie Woodworks

### Best Local Book Store

**Winner: Werner Books and Coffee**

Runners-up: Pressed Books & Coffee, Books Galore

### Best Barbershop

**Winner: Ruiz Barbershop**

Runners-up: V's Barber Shop, Colony Barber Shop

### Best Spa

**Winner: Coventina Day and Med Spa**

Runners-up: Panache Salon and Spa, Rejuv MedSpa, Salon, and Wellness

### Best Beauty Salon

**Winner: Moxi Hair Salon**

Runners-up: Coventina Day and Medical Spa, Ambridge Rose Salon & Spa

### Best Dog Groomer

**Winner: Paws and Claws Pet Resort**

Runners-up: Buzz n' B's Aquarium and Pet Shop, Erie Humane Society Pet Wellness Clinic

### Best Place to Adopt a Pet

**Winner: ANNA Shelter**

Runners-up: Erie Humane Society, Because You Care, Inc

### Best Bike Shop

**Winner: 814 Outdoor Sports**

Runners-up: John Adams Cycling & Fitness, Bert's Bikes and Fitness

### Best Auto Repair Shop

**Winner: Bonnell's Collision Center**

Runners-up: Bianchi Honda, Kerr's Tire

Korner

### Best Web Developer

**Winner: Epic Web Studios**

Runners-up: Erie Multimedia, Gem City Creative

### Best Graphic Designer

**Winner: Mark Nardo - Erie Ale Works**

Runners-up: Carley Biebel - Epic Web Studios, Marlee Malpiedi - Art by Marlee

### Best Advertising Agency

**Winner: 814 Digital**

Runners-up: R Frank Media, Gem City Creative

### Best Law Firm

**Winner: Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett, P.C.**

Runners-up: MacDonald, Illig, Jones & Britton, Quinn Law Firm

### Best Real Estate Agency

**Winner: Agresti Real Estate Agency**

Runners-up: Howard Hanna Agency, Marsha Marsh Real Estate Services

### Best Bed and Breakfast

**Winner: Spencer House Bed & Breakfast**

Runners-up: The Victoria On Main, The



# BEST OF ERIE

© JESSICA HUNTER



Glass Growers Gallery, winner of Best Art Gallery 2024 and runner-up for Best Boutique.

Elsie Greer House Bed & Breakfast

**Best Tattoo Parlor**

**Winner: Ink Assassins**

Runners-up: Wayward Tattoo Studio, Steadfast Tattoo

**Best Florist**

**Winner: Allburn Florist**

Runners-up: Potratz Floral Shop & Greenhouses, Inc., Gerlach's Garden & Floral

**Best Greenhouse**

**Winner: Stan's Garden Center**

Runners-up: Mason Farms, Potratz Floral Shop & Greenhouses

**Best Place to Camp**

**Winner: Sparrow Pond Family Campground**

Runners-up: Sara's Campground, Camp Sherwin (YMCA of Greater Erie)

**Best Neighborhood Grocer**

**Winner: Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meat**

Runners-up: Erie Food Co-op, Gordon's Butcher & Market

**Best Landscaper**

**Winner: Gerlach's Property Maintenance**

Runners-up: Dahlkemper Landscape Architects & Contractors, J J Wurst Landscape Contractors and Garden Center

**Best Electrician**

**Winner: Church & Murdock Electric Inc**

Runners-up: Dobrich Electric, Hilbrich Electric JE

**Best Plumber**

**Winner: TJ's Plumbing & Heating of Erie, Inc.**

Runners-up: Wm T Spaeder Company, C. Carlin Plumbing

**Best Residential Roofer**

**Winner: Angelo's Roofing**

Runners-up: Bauer Specialty, Alex Roofing Company

**Best General Contractor**

**Winner: Great Lakes Construction**

Runners-up: Father and Son Remodeling, E. E. Austin and Son

**Best Pet Daycare**

**Winner: Paws 'n Claws Pet Resort**

Runners-up: Lucky Dog Stay and Play, Buzz n' B's

**Best HVAC**

**Winner: J.J. Agnello**

**Heating & Cooling**

Runners-up: TJ's Plumbing & Heating of Erie, Nerthling's Heating & Air Conditioning

**Best Production Company**

**Winner: WQLN PBS NPR**

Runners-up: R. Frank Media, Erie Multimedia

**Best Med Spa**

**Winner: Coventina Day and Medical Spa**

Runners-up: ReJuv Med Spa, Salon, & Wellness, Glow Laser & Beauty Center

**Best Dispensary**

**Winner: Rise Erie**

Runners-up: Curaleaf, Sunnyside Medical Cannabis Dispensary

**Best Nail Salon**

**Winner: Coventina Day and Medical Spa**

Runners-up: M Nails and Spa, Panache Salon and Spa

**Best Thrift/Consignment Store**

**Winner: The Sassy Peacock**

Runners-up: The Salvation Army Family Store, AMVETS Erie

**Best Record Store**

**Winner: Legenderie Records and Coffee House**

Runners-up: Graham's Records, The Exchange

**CULTURE & NIGHTLIFE**

**Best Museum**

**Winner: ExpERIENCE**

**Children's Museum**

Runners-up: Erie Art Museum, Tom Ridge Environmental Center

**Best Art Gallery**

**Winner: Glass Growers Gallery**

Runners-up: 10/20 Collective, City Gallery

**Best Community Theatre**

**Winner: Erie Playhouse**

Runners-up: PACA, Mercyhurst University Theatre Program

**Best Dance School**

**Winner: Long's School of Dance**

Runners-up: Little Dance Studio, Marguerite's Academy of Dance

**Best Photographer**

**Winner: R. Frank Media**

Runners-up: Mike Conway Photography, Katie Mihalak Photography

**Best Visual Artist**

**Winner: Adam Stempka**

Runners-up: Eerie Eric Fargiorgio, Kaitlyn Page

ANDY DALTON



CEE Brown (center), winner of Best Hip-Hop Artist 2024, alongside Eric Brewer and Friends, winner of Best Original Band



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# KNOX LAW WELCOMES KATHRYN A. PENICK



**Kathryn A. Penick** is a new associate with Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett, P.C.

Kathryn concentrates her practice on elder law and estate planning & administration. She helps clients protect their assets through estate planning, trust planning, and tax planning, prioritizing each client's legacy goals. She has a variety of legal-related experience, including internships with the U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado, Milton and Charlotte Kramer

Law Clinic, Canada-United States Law Institute, and Office of Public Prosecutions of Mauritius.

Kathryn earned her J.D. from Case Western Reserve University School of Law, where she was a Hugo Grotius International Law Fellow. She also earned an LL.M. Master of International and European Business Law from the Universidad Pontificia de Comillas in Spain, and a B.A. from Regis University, where she graduated summa cum laude. She speaks conversational French and Japanese.

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



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JESSICA HUNTER



Samurai Kitchen, winner of Best Sushi Restaurant 2024 and runner-up for Best Asian/Indian/Nepali Restaurant

**Best Band (Original)**

**Winner: Eric Brewer & Friends**

Runners-up: Smilo & The Ghost, Six Year Stretch

**Best New Band/Musician (Last Two Years)**

**Winner: Hotdog Thursday**

Runners-up: Piano Punk, Matthew Crays & Co.

**Best Cover Band**

**Winner: The Groove**

Runners-up: First to Eleven, Small Town Revolution

**Best Vocalist**

**Winner: Audra Miller**

Runners-up: Roy Hollis, Preston Dille-muth

**Best Hip-Hop Artist/Group**

**Winner: CEE Brown**

Runners-up: Solo Gambino, THOT Sav-  
iors

**Best Instrumentalist**

**Winner: Eric Brewer (Eric Brewer and Friends)**

Runners-up: Allen Zurcher (Erie Phil-harmonic), Jonathan Nolan (The Mulli-gans)

**Best DJ**

**Winner: Millennium Sound Productions**

Runners-up: DJ Bill Page, DJ Tony J

**Best Irish Pub**

**Winner: McGarrey's Oakwood Cafe**

Runners-up: Sullivan's, Lavery Brewing Co.

**Best Patio**

**Winner: Oliver's Beer Garden**

Runners-up: Pier 6 Rooftop Bar, Rum Runners

**Best Festival**

**Winner: Celebrate Erie**

Runners-up: Peek'n Peak Fall Fest, Zabawa Polish Festival

**Best Music Series**

**Winner: 8 Great Tuesdays**

Runners-up: Celebrate Erie, Sunset Mu-  
sic Series

**FOOD & DRINK**

**Best Restaurant**

**Winner: Bar Ronin**

Runners-up: Federal Hill Smokehouse,  
Pineapple Eddie Southern Bistro

**Best New Restaurant (Within Last Two Years)**

**Winner: ippa Pizza Napoletana**

Runners-up: Bakery on 5th, Roma's Ital-  
ian Kitchen

**Best Chef**

**Winner: Stephen Stanbro (Bro Man's Sanniches)**

Runners-up: Jean Paul (Pineapple Eddie Southern Bistro), Dan Kern (Bar Ronin)

**Best Bakery**

**Winner: Art's Bakery**

Runners-up: Herb & Honey Bakery, Ye Olde Sweet Shoppe

**Best Coffee Shop**

**Winner: Tippy Bean Cafe**

Runners-up: Ember + Forge, Brew Haha at the Colony

**Best Ice Cream Shop**

**Winner: Whippy Dip**

Runners-up: The Straw Hat Sundae Shop, Whippy Dip 2

**Best Chocolates or Candy**

**Winner: Romolo Chocolates**

Runners-up: Pulakos Chocolates, Ste-fanelli's Candies

**Best Donut Shop**

**Winner: Mighty Fine Donuts**

Runners-up: H & K Donut Shop, Fuhr-man's

**Best Dinor**

**Winner: Gem City Dinor**

Runners-up: Flip Cafe, The Dinor at Lawrence Park

**Best Brunch**

**Winner: Flip Cafe**

Runners-up: Gem City Dinor, The Cork 1794

**Best Brewery**

**Winner: Lavery Brewing Co.**

Runners-up: Erie Brewing Company, Voodoo Brewing Company

**Best Locally Made Beer**

**Winner: Lavery Brewing Company - Dulachan**

Runners-up: Erie Brewing Company, Erie Ale Works - Tattooed Lady

JESSICA HUNTER



El Amigo, winner of Best Mexican Restaurant and Best Taco 2024



# BEST OF ERIE

JESSICA HUNTER



Nicole and Jason Lavery, winners of Best Entrepreneurs 2024; Lavery Brewing Company won Best Brewery, Best Locally Made Beer (Dulachan), and was runner-up for Best Bar and Best Irish Pub.

## Best Winery

**Winner: Arundel Cellars & Brewing Co.**

Runners-up: Mazza Vineyards, 6 Mile Cellars

## Best Distillery

**Winner: Altered State Distillery**

Runners-up: Luminary Distilling, Erie Distillery

## Best Bar Food

**Winner: Odis 12**

Runners-up: Plymouth Tavern, BIGBAR

## Best Sandwich Shop

**Winner: Bro Man's Sammiches**

Runners-up: Picasso's, Teresa's Italian Deli

## Best Deli

**Winner: Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meats**

Runners-up: Gordon's Butcher & Market, Teresa's Italian Deli

## Best Burger

**Winner: Bro Man's Sammiches**

Runners-up: Bar Ronin, Odis 12

## Best Pizzeria

**Winner: John's Wildwood Pizza**

Runners-up: ippa Pizza Napoletana, Valerio's Italian Restaurant & Pizzeria

## Best Wings

**Winner: Odis 12**

Runners-up: Park Tavern, One Way Inn

## Best Sushi

**Winner: Samurai Kitchen + Sushi**

Runners-up: Ichiban, Bar Ronin

## Best Food Truck

**Winner: Que Abides**

Runners-up: A Waffle Miracle, Atacolyse Food Truck

**Best Place for Vegan or Vegetarian Food**

**Winner: Erie Food Co-op**

Runners-up: The Juice Jar, Like My Thai

## Best Barbecue Restaurant

**Winner: Federal Hill Smokehouse**

Runners-up: Underdog BBQ, The Que Abides

## Best Seafood Restaurant

**Winner: Bay House Oyster Bar & Restaurant**

Runners-up: Smuggler's Wharf, Pineapple Eddie Southern Bistro

## Best Asian/Indian/Nepali Restaurant

**Winner: Like My Thai**

Runners-up: Thai Eatery, Samurai Kitchen + Sushi

## Best Italian Restaurant

**Winner: Mi Scuzi**

Runners-up: Cola's Ristorante, Valerio's Italian Restaurant & Pizzeria

## Best Mexican Restaurant

**Winner: El Amigo Mexican Grill**

Runners-up: El Canelo, Torero's

**Best Mediterranean or Middle Eastern Restaurant**

**Winner: Bistro 26**

Runners-up: Habibi, Casablanca Grill

## Best Caterer

**Winner: Cali's West**

Runners-up: Teresa's Deli and Catering,

Valerio's Catering

## Best Waterfront Dining

**Winner: Oliver's Rooftop & Beer Garden**

Runners-up: Pier 6 Rooftop Bar & Grill, Sunset Grill

## Best Romantic Restaurant

**Winner: Oliver's Rooftop**

Runners-up: Mi Scuzi, Cola's Restaurant

## Best Health Food Store

**Winner: Erie Food Co-op**

Runners-up: Juice Jar, Dietary Foods

## Best Bar

**Winner: Plymouth Tavern**

Runners-up: BIGBAR, Lavery Brewing Company

## Best Taco

**Winner: El Amigo**

Runners-up: Bro Man's Sammiches, El Canelo

## PEOPLE & PLACES

### Best Place to Work

**Winner: Erie Insurance**

Runners-up: Erie Federal Credit Union, Shriners Hospitals for Children - Erie

### Best Place for a First Date

**Winner: Presque Isle State Park**

Runners-up: Room 33 Speakeasy, Oliver's Rooftop

### Best Place to Take Your Dog

**Winner: Presque Isle State Park**

Runners-up: Frontier Park, Asbury Woods

JESSICA HUNTER



Legenderie Records and Coffee, winner of Best Record Store 2024

JESSICA HUNTER



Werner Books and Coffee, winner of Best Local Business, Best New Business, and Best Local Bookstore 2024; owners Kyle Churman and Lauren Shoemaker were runners-up for Best Entrepreneurs



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**BEST OF ERIE 2023**

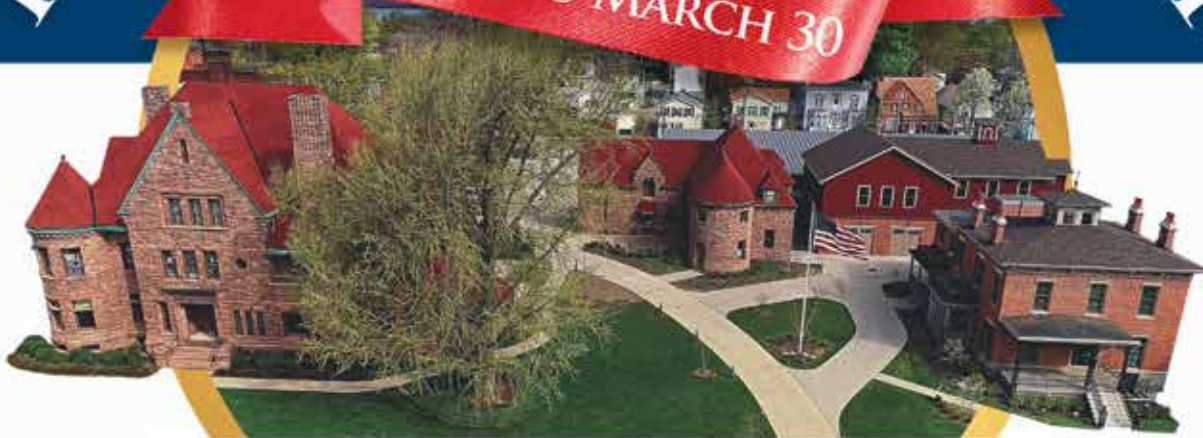
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JESSICA HUNTER



Seth Trott of Quinn Law Firm, winner of Best Attorney 2024

**Best Radio Station**

**Winner: 92.7 Happi WICU-FM**

Runners-up: 90.5 WERG Gannon Radio, 103.7 Star 104

**Best Radio Personality (or Radio Team)**

**Winner: Jessica Curry Carlson (Star 104)**

Runners-up: Bobbi Bones (93.9 The Wolf), Lou Baxter (LECOM Radio)

**Best TV Personality**

**Winner: Tom Atkins**

Runners-up: John Stehlin, Sean Lafferty

**Best Filmmaker**

**Winner: Chronicles (WQLN/PBS)**

Runners-up: Everything At Once Studios LLC, Jesse James

**Best Yoga Space**

**Winner: yogaErie**

Runners-up: Dreaming Tree Yoga, Bare-foot Buddha

**Best Theatrical Performer**

**Winner: Adele Crotty**

Runners-up: Matt Fuchs, Kate Neubert-Lechner

**Best Nonprofit**

**Winner: The ANNA Shelter**

Runners-up: Shriners Hospital Erie, Erie Zoo

**Best University**

**Winner: Penn State Behrend**

Runners-up: Gannon University, Mercyhurst University

**Best Fitness Club**

**Winner: YMCA**

Runners-up: ASCEND Erie, FitnessU

**Best Bowling Alley**

**Winner: Greengarden Lanes**

Runners-up: Eastway Lanes, Rolling Meadow Lanes

**Best Team to Root for**

**Winner: Erie Otters**

Runners-up: Erie SeaWolves, Erie Roller Derby

**Best Lawyer**

**Winner: Seth Trott - Quinn Law Firm**

Runners-up: Kim Oakes - MacDonald, Illig, Jones & Britton, Alan Natalie, Attorney at Law

**Best Dentist**

**Winner: Dr. David Demarco**

Runners-up: Dr. Carla Orlando, Dr. Laura King

**Best Golf Course**

**Winner: Whispering Woods Golf Club**

Runners-up: The Kahkwa Club, Lawrence Park Golf Club

**Best Real Estate Agent**

**Winner: Max Rankin - RE/MAX**

Runners-up: Sarah O'Neill - Agresti Real Estate, Stephanie Montgomery - Coldwell Banker

**Best Local Entrepreneur(s)**

**Winner: Jason and Nicole Lavery - Lavery Brewing Company**

Runners-up: Kyle Churman and Lauren Shoemaker - Werner Books & Coffee, Dena Rupp - Purrista Cat Cafe

**Best Podcast**

**Winner: Spotlight 814**

Runners-up: Idiotville: Erie, PA's Favorite Podcast, 2 Man Happy Hour

**Best Hiking Trails**

**Winner: Asbury Woods**

Runners-up: Wintergreen Gorge, Presque Isle State Park

**Best Park**

**Winner: Presque Isle State Park**

Runners-up: Frontier Park, Asbury Woods

**Best Outdoor Adventure Activity**

**Winner: Presque Isle State Park**

Runners-up: Waldameer Park and Water World, Erie Zoo

**Best Wedding Venue**

**Winner: Warner Theatre**

Runners-up: Port Farms, Peek'n Peak Resort

**Best Veterinary Practice**

**Winner: Glenwood Pet Hospital**

Runners-up: The ANNA Wellness Center, Animal Ark Pet Hospital

**Best Athletic Competition**

**Winner: Barber Beast on the Bay**

Runners-up: Save an Eye Game, Erie Roller Derby

**Best Heritage Festival**

**Winner: Zabawa Polish Heritage Festival**

Runners-up: Panegyri Greek Festival,

Erie Irish Festival

**Best Doctor/PCP**

**Winner: Dr. Christine (Brown) Agnello**

Runners-up: Dr. Pamela Beck, Dr. Kelli DeSanctis

**Best Physical Therapist**

**Winner: Shriners' Children's Hospital Erie**

Runners-up: Ashley & Kuzma Therapeutics, FYZICAL Therapy & Balance Centers

**Best Mental Health Counseling**

**Winner: Safe Harbor Behavioral Health**

Runners-up: AHN Behavioral Health, Barber Behavioral Health

**Best Chiropractor**

**Winner: Iadeluca Chiropractic**

Runners-up: Lake Erie Spine & Injury Center, Nash Chiropractic

**Best Indoor Playground/Trampoline Park**

**Winner: Vertical Jump Park**

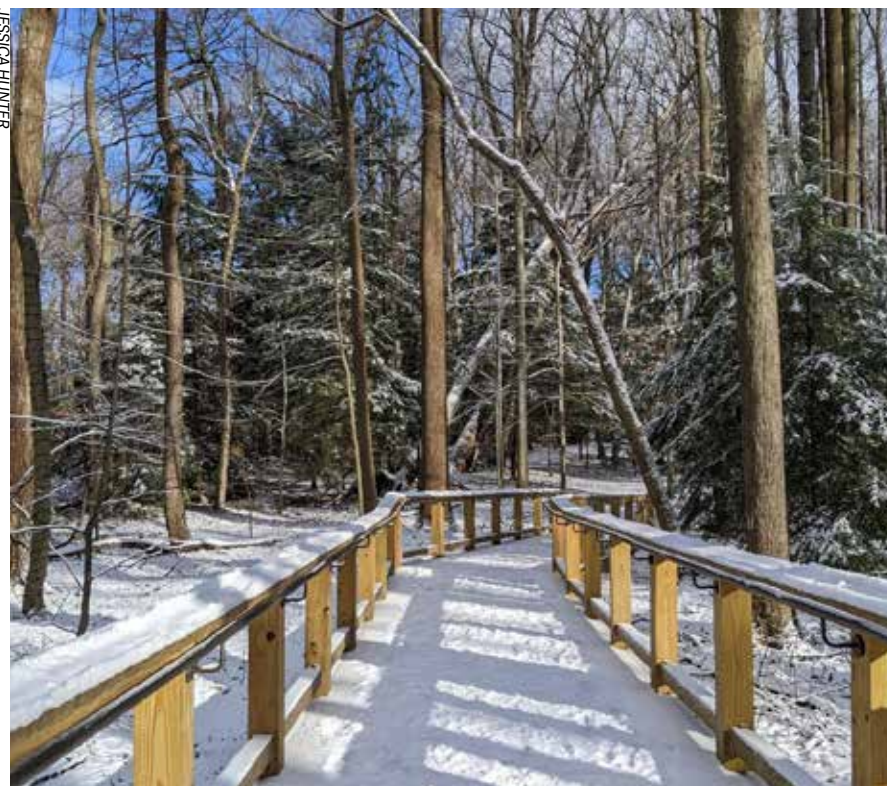
Runners-up: Elevate Trampoline Park, Jumpin' Jungle

**Best Massage Therapist**

**Winner: Coventina Day and Medical Spa**

Runners-up: Massage Envy, Monacella Massage & Kinesiology

JESSICA HUNTER



Asbury Woods, winner of Best Hiking Trails 2024; runner-up for Best Park and Best Place to Take Your Dog



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## EVENTS

### Hagen History Center Unveils Pay What You Wish for 2025

Locals can visit the museum for any price during the first quarter of 2025

**CONTINUING THURSDAY, JAN. 9**

For the first time, the Hagen History Center will offer Pay What You Wish for the first quarter of 2025 for all Erie county residents. Local visitors must show proof of residency and will be able to decide the amount to pay for admission for access to the entire museum, including their new exhibits.

Executive Director Cal Pifer (2013 honoree of Erie's 40 Under 40) explained that the museum is looking to attract more locals, since the majority of their visitors are from outside of the area. "It's a phenomenon we see across the country. I mean, how many New Yorkers have never visited the Statue of Liberty?" Pifer said. "We all have gems in our own backyard so this is just a little bit of a push to get people to either check us out for the first time or come back if it's been a while."

The new exhibits on the second and third floor of the Watson Curtze Mansion reflect Erie's unique history. The "Made You Look: Erie signs with plenty of history and nostalgia" exhibit

CONTRIBUTED



From now until March, the Hagen History Center is offering visitors a "pay what you wish" entry fee. The folks at the center are hoping this will entice more locals to visit the museum, which includes newly curated exhibits featuring the Erie Zoo and historic public signs.

features historic signage from around the Erie area. "It's really nice because they're large pieces that really haven't been displayed previously due to their size," Pifer said.

The other exhibit, "100 years of the Erie Zoo: it roars with memories" displays aspects of the zoo from its founding to the present day. "It brought back so many memories for me, as a kid growing up here in Erie."

Pifer explained. "The zoo was a part of so many of our childhoods."

Since March 2024, the museum has opened 10 new exhibits with pop-ups monthly, with more to come in the new year. — Alana Sabol

*The Pay What You Wish promotion will continue through March 30, 2025 // Hagen History Center, 356 W. 6th St. // For more info: eriehistory.org*

## Benedictine Peacemakers Monastic Immersion

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Applications open until Feb 28  
[mscully@eriebenedictines.org](mailto:mscully@eriebenedictines.org)

### PACA Presents Award-Winning Comedy *God of Carnage*

The darkly funny play about the unraveling of civility

**BEGINNING FRIDAY, JAN. 17**

Yasmina Reza's *God of Carnage*, the 2009 Tony Award-winning comedy, will captivate Erie audiences at PACA from Jan. 17 to Feb. 2. Directed by Mark Tanenbaum, this sharp and thoughtful production explores what happens when our raw and vulnerable human instincts are left exposed.

The story unfolds as two Brooklyn couples meet to discuss a playground altercation between their sons. What begins as a polite attempt at conflict resolution descends into chaos, with shifting alliances, biting dialogue, and hilarity that reveals the thin veneer of social decorum. Tanenbaum describes *God of Carnage* as "a 'thinking person's' play" that delves into "the costs of parenting, the toll our children take on us, and the notion that societal civility is just a collection of artificial customs."

The talented cast includes veteran performers Kate Neubert-Lechner, Josiah Prettie, Daniel Stripp, and Norah Schillinger. Assistant director Teresa Tetrake collaborates to bring the production to life, which includes the use

CONTRIBUTED



Catch *God of Carnage*, the Tony Award-winning comedy playing this month at PACA. What begins as a playground dispute between parents turns into an all-out war, lifting the veil off of societal norms in this hilarious, deeply human production.

of authentic local artwork.

"I enjoy plays that strip away the characters' best intentions and allow their natural human qualities to pour through," Tanenbaum shares. "If it happens to be funny, all the better."

Don't miss your chance to witness a production Tanenbaum assures will resonate deeply with Erie's audience. Beyond this month's *God of Carnage*, PACA continues its 13th season, which Tanenbaum calls their "most ambitious yet"

"It contains musicals, dramas, comedies, classics, and modern works. It really has something for everyone," Tanenbaum says. "PACA is truly grateful for all the support that the Erie audience has heaped upon us over the years." — Aaron Mook

*Weekends beginning Friday, Jan. 17 // Thursday, Friday, and Saturday shows at 7:30, Sunday matinee at 2 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$20 // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com*



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**TAIZÉ** *Taizé is held at the Cathedral on the second Sunday of every month at 5:00 P.M.* This is an evening service of quiet, contemplative prayer. It includes candlelight, scripture, and **prayerful meditation** through song. We hope to create a **thin place** where you may encounter God and experience the power of silence.

**CELTIC** *Celtic Spirituality is held at the Cathedral on the third Sunday of each month at 5:00 P.M.* Celtic Spirituality Nights are an opportunity to come to awareness of God's **healing** and **hope-filled** presence. Through poetry, reflection, prayer, music, and engagement with the Celtic Spirit, you are invited to **discover** hope, wholeness, and renewal. Come and explore with us.

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## EVENTS

### Let's Eat, Erie!

VisitErie's Restaurant Week is back and bigger than ever before

#### BEGINNING FRIDAY, JAN. 17

Coming down from the fast-paced nature of the holiday season, restaurants have often found the month of January to be a notoriously slow period. In our own home kitchens, we may face something similar.

To combat these common issues, Erie Restaurant Week is returning for its fifth year and will run from Jan. 17 through Jan. 26. The nine-day event is put on by VisitErie to promote local businesses in the Erie area while also creating a unique dining experience in our more well-known or chain locations.

During this time, many restaurants will offer special menus, pricing, and accommodations specific to your dining needs.

Since its inception in 2020, Erie Restaurant Week has seen a steady increase in participation from many of the delicious eateries our city has to offer. This year,

64 restaurants will be participating. To showcase how far the event has come, VisitErie's Director of Communications Christine Temple stated, "The first year we had 19 restaurants and this year is our largest ever."

More than a dozen new restaurants will be participating this year, including but not limited to: Avanti's Restaurant, The Boardroom Dining & Spirits, Bro Man's Birria N Burger Joint, Edinboro Hotel Bar, Five Iron Golf, Give a Crepe/La CrepErie, ippa Pizza, Mi Scuzi Italian Ristorante, Mound Grove Golf Course, Oasis Pub, Taco Cantina, Triple D's Tasty Grill, and more. — Cassandra Gripp

Friday, Jan. 17 through Sunday, Jan. 26

// Hours vary per venue // For a full list of participating restaurants, visit: [visiterie.com/restaurant-week/](http://visiterie.com/restaurant-week/)

JESSICA HUNTER



VisitErie's fifth annual restaurant week kicks off on Friday, Jan. 17 and features its largest host of participating locations yet. Sixty-four eateries will provide specials, deals, and new menu items to entice visitors during a notoriously slow month.

### Gain Aura Points at Infinite Love Yoga's First Anniversary Celebration

Feel the vibrations and find your tribe with The Auracle and Purrista Cat Cafe

#### SATURDAY, JAN. 18

Infinite Love Yoga is celebrating its first year in business this January with a special anniversary celebration featuring The Auracle and Purrista Cat Cafe to help raise your vibration and find your tribe for 2025.

The yoga studio prides itself on being a welcoming community with experienced yoga instructors who respect the classical teachings and traditions of yoga as a complete system. Infinite Love Yoga is also a peaceful space for personal and collective evolution, welcoming in practitioners of reiki, sound, and energy healing, and hosting monthly moon circles to encourage mental well-being, support, and connection.

The Auracle, a Cleveland-based business, will offer a variety of aura portraits (by appointment) at the event, including singles, couples, and a "yours, mine, and ours package." These portraits will appeal to those who enjoy crystals, astrology, and energy practices. This is the first time they have been offered in Erie.

The aura, or biofield, refers to the concept of an energetic field that surrounds and permeates the human body, made up of the electromagnetic fields created by the body's cells, tissues, and organs. Biofield therapies and yoga are

both related to the idea that the human body has an energy field that can be affected to improve health and well-being. Yoga practices, yoga nidra, and other healing practices often refer to this energy body. Getting a glimpse of yours on film can provide a variety of insights.

"We incorporate color psychology, sociological theories, and cultural beliefs into our interpretations," explained Jeanette Troiano, owner of The Auracle. "We want everyone to connect with this personality snapshot on a personal level that helps validate or better understand their awareness of their own energy."

"There are different types of aura photos including those with computer printouts but we have the AuraCamera6000 that uses real film," said Troiano. "It's Fuji Instamax but works the same as the classic Polaroid that many of us grew up with, so that adds a layer of nostalgia to the experience. We really appreciate the value of having a tangible reminder of this specific energetic moment. That's really what the camera does — it creates a physical interpretation of your current aura. Using special hand sensors, the camera reads each person's vibration which corresponds to specific wavelengths and colors on the visible spectrum."

In addition to aura portraits, the event will allow visitors to tour the studio, meet new friends, and network with instruc-

AMY VANSOTER



Celebrate the first anniversary of Infinite Love yoga studio by stopping by to join in the festivities. Attendees can book a session with The Auracle and have a custom aura portrait created, tour the studio, or grab a specialty drink available from Purrista Cat Cafe.

tors and practitioners. Raffles and special yoga class packages will also be available. Purrista Cat Cafe will be on site offering a signature drink for the event, the Aura Cooler, consisting of White Lotus Energy, seltzer, blueberry syrup and edible glitter. Purrista will also have select treats and merch for sale at the event.

"For nearly three years, Purrista Cat Café has partnered with Infinite Love Yoga's owner, Amy, to bring you the unique joy of our Cat Yoga Experience. Combining mindfulness, gentle movement, and the playful energy of our adoptable feline friends, these sessions have become a cherished part of our community," said Dena Rupp, owner of Purrista Cat Cafe.

"We are so grateful for our collab and now, we're thrilled to celebrate Amy's exciting new endeavor — her own yoga studio Infinite Love. We can't wait to celebrate and see our combined energies grow in 2025!" — Amy VanScoter

Aura portraits at Infinite Love can be booked by visiting [the-auracle.square.site](http://the-auracle.square.site).

Amy VanScoter is the founder of Infinite Love Yoga LLC

10 a.m. to 3 p.m. // Infinite Love Yoga, inside St Mary's Space to Create, 310 E. 10th St. // Free parking in rear // Free admission // For more info: [infiniteyoga.com](http://infiniteyoga.com)



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## Eat, Drink, and be Merry at Madeline's with Four Killer Stand-Ups

Cranesville event space will be privy to a very special dinner and comedy show

**SATURDAY, JAN. 18**

**M**adeline's Dining and Events will host a first-time event featuring four talented comedians from Pittsburgh and Cleveland. Ray DeVito will headline, with Chris Scriva as the featured act, Julian Atwater as the opener, and Josh Rittenauer as the evening's host. And, since this is Madeline's, it won't be simply a comedy event — with a luxurious dinner buffet as part of the ticket price. Desserts, appetizers, and a cash bar will also be available to guests.

Nestled along PA Route 18 just south of Girard, Madeline's (formerly Crowley's Restaurant) is no stranger to special events (such as the murder mysteries of the In All Seriousness comedy troupe). This evening, though, will be the first event of its kind featuring stand-up comedy in its gorgeous back dining room.

Ray DeVito, a hard-working former New Yorker now based in Cleveland, is a longstanding comedian with a veritable jukebox of topics. Will he talk about art gallery accidents, his Burger

King shame, SpongeBob underwear, or (more than likely) something new entirely? Host of the podcast *Rock Bottom* — which recently featured Scriva as a guest—and co-producer of the InFamous Ray's comedy series, DeVito has been featured on Comedy Central, the Bob and Tom Show, been named SiriusXM's comedian of the week, and has one of the top sets at Dry Bar.

Pittsburgh's own Chris Scriva will return to Erie County as the featured act, as he takes you through his experience growing up in a blue collar world while finding his own identity and punk rock ethos, taking improv classes in Chicago, and then returning to the area he grew up in. Scriva hosts the *Lost Cause* podcast and has traveled the area with the Don't Tell Comedy series.

Opener Julian Atwater is a relative newcomer to the comedy scene, but no stranger to the stage, being a hip-hop artist from the Steel City. Your evening's host Josh Rittenauer is Rust Belt soul, a master of crowd work, and a great comedian in his own right covering topics



Catch dinner and show all in one go. Take a short drive to Cranesville to experience a night of headlining comedy acts alongside a tasty meal at Madeline's as they host four stand-up comics in one hilarious evening.

like overeating, love languages, January 6, and failed Civil War reenactments.

So if you like adult, cutting-edge comedy and great food, this might just be the event for you. — Nick Warren

Doors at 5:00 p.m., dinner at 7:00 p.m. with show following // Madeline's Dining and Events, 8844 PA-18, Cranesville // Tickets starting at \$45 // For tickets and more information go to [tickets.erieereader.com](https://tickets.erieereader.com)



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## EVENTS

### Order Up! *Waitress* on Stage at Erie Playhouse

Tony-award winning musical gets new year cooking

#### BEGINNING FRIDAY, JAN. 24

In 2007 a beautiful little film called *Waitress* debuted in theaters, about a woman who bakes her feelings at a small-town diner, while trapped in an abusive marriage. Eight years later singer-songwriter Sara Bareilles debuted a show of her own on a Harvard stage, a musical based on this tender, funny movie, which quickly made it to Broadway later that year. A decade later it's coming to the NWPA community as the Erie Playhouse makes it its own.

The Playhouse is kicking off the new year with a multi-Tony Award-nominated showstopper, with its many moving parts under the direction of Trish Yates. "This show beautifully parallels the baking of a pie — ingredients that are unexpected, crafted, mixed together, and then baked to reveal a delicious dessert: a sweet and tangy ending," said Yates. She continued, "Ordinary lives each have extraordinary purpose."

Starring Rebecca Keim, who is making her mainstage debut as Jenna, Kyle Filbeck as Dr. Pomatter, Lizdel Collado-Monahan as Becky, and Shawna Daisley as

Dawn, there will also be a little Easter egg for those in the know in the Erie music scene: "Jenna...reflects on her memories of her mother throughout the show...What makes this so poignant is the actors who play the roles are mother and daughter in real life. Becca Keim and her mother Julie Moore have some beautiful unspoken moments on stage," Yates said.

"The show is witty, fast paced, toe-tapping, and is one of the most intricate staged shows I have ever directed," Yates continued. "Each part moves seamlessly as the ensemble flows from one scene to the next." Besides the complexity of the staging, however, *Waitress* reveals the complexity of burgeoning motherhood and enduring friendships, and the transformative power of having someone believe in you — as well as having something to fight for. — Cara Suppa

*Weekends, Jan. 24 through Feb. 9 // Friday and Saturdays shows at 7:30 p.m., Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. // \$19.40 to \$30.40 // For tickets and info: [erieplayhouse.org](http://erieplayhouse.org)*



Shawna Daisley (left, playing Dawn) baked both a chocolate and a mermaid pie for Ryan Dawley (playing Ogie) in the upcoming Erie Playhouse production of the Tony Award-nominated showstopper *Waitress*.

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## EVENTS

### Erie Philharmonic Starts Off 2025 with *Rhapsody in Blue*

Gershwin's composition brought to life by global piano sensation Janice Carissa

**SATURDAY, JAN. 25**

The Erie Philharmonic will be kicking off 2025 with a performance of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, featuring pianist Janice Carissa performing the iconic composition over a century after its debut. Accompanying Gershwin's fusion of classical music and jazz will be Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Tallis Fantasia* and Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5.

American bandleader Paul Whiteman commissioned Gershwin to write a concerto-inspired jazz composition in honor of Abraham Lincoln's birthday, having been impressed with the composer's work with the one-act jazz opera *Blue Monday* and fellow collaborations on Broadway. Gershwin initially declined due to the timeframe but was persuaded after news of the partnership broke in the Jan. 4 edition of the New York Tribune and claims from Whiteman that rival bandleader Vincent Lopez would steal the concert style. Initially titled *American Rhapsody*, Gershwin wrote the original manuscript for two pianos in just five weeks — and many of the thematic ideas were inspired by a train ride from Boston.

George's brother Ira suggested changing the composition title to *Rhapsody in Blue* after visiting an exhibition of paintings by James McNeill Whistler. With the score complete, Gershwin gave the piece to Whiteman's arranger Ferde Grofe, who completed the or-

chestration eight days before the premiere. *Rhapsody in Blue* premiered on Feb. 12, 1924, at the Aeolian Hall in New York City and was performed by Paul Whiteman's Palais Royal Orchestra. Many of the composition's signature hallmarks, such as the extended glissando from clarinetist Ross Gorman and Gershwin's piano solo, were improvised during rehearsals. The critical reception was a success, and Whiteman would sell over a million copies of the composition by 1927.

The piano soloist gracing the Warner Theatre stage during this performance, Janice Carissa, has previously performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the San Diego Symphony, the Nashville Symphony, and the Berlin Philharmonic, captivating audiences worldwide at the United Nations, Carnegie Hall, Sydney Opera House, and for the President of Indonesia. The native Indonesian is a recipient of the Salon de Virtuosi and the Gilmore Young Artist award, and in addition, is a member of the Jupiter Chamber Players and American collective Ensemble 132. Carissa studied at the Curtis Institute of Music and received her master's degree from The Julliard School as a Konver Fellow. Erie is lucky to have her for this one special night. —Thomas Taylor

7:30 to 9:30 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$17-\$61 // For tickets and info: [eriephil.org](http://eriephil.org)



Join the Erie Philharmonic for their first symphonic concert of 2025 as they perform George Gershwin's 1924 composition *Rhapsody in Blue* featuring piano soloist Janice Carissa.

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## EVENTS

### Presque Isle's Winter Discovery Day

A show in the snow

**SATURDAY, FEB. 1**

Presque Isle State Park is always bustling during the summer months, but there is still plenty to do with Erie's greatest natural resource during the winter time, too. The Presque Isle Partnership's annual Winter Discovery Day celebrates just that.

Held in the Waterworks area in Shelters 1 and 2, the event features plenty of family-friendly activities, including fishing lessons with S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie (no license is required), Animal Feeder Craft Activities, and Sled Dog Demonstrations with Red Sky Working Siberians (a Fairview based recreational mushing team). Attendees will also be allowed into the Presque Isle Lighthouse between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Once inside, there will be opportunities to learn a little about the lighthouse's history, grab a hot beverage, and create some Valentine's Day crafts.

Even though the intent is to highlight winter activities, some of the planned events are weather-dependent, including snow shoe tryouts, horse-drawn wagon rides with John May Farm Activities (for a cost of \$3), and cross country ski rentals (additional rental fee). If you are planning to bring the family, chances are that you will get hungry, and Underdog BBQ will be on hand selling some of their most popular dishes. For those who just want a small treat that will help keep you warm, there will be hot chocolate available for purchase as well.



Presque Isle State Park isn't just for summertime fun. Join the folks from the Presque Isle Partnership as they present their annual Winter Discovery Day featuring food, warm drinks, horse-drawn carriage rides, and demonstrations of sled dogs, ice fishing, snowshoeing, and more with tours of the Presque Isle Lighthouse.

The event is free and open to the public; however, there is a suggested donation of \$3 to benefit Presque Isle Partnership, so the organization can continue to bring events like this to the park. Bundle up, strap on your boots, and discover winter at Presque Isle. — Larry Wheaton

11 a.m. to 2 p.m. // Waterworks Area (Rotary Pavilion, Shelters 1 and 2) at Presque Isle State Park, 1 Peninsula Dr. // Free (\$3 suggested donation) // For info: discoverpi.com

### Yamato Drumming Up Excitement at MIAC

Fan-favorite returns to the Mercyhurst stage

**TUESDAY, FEB. 4**

For more than 32 years, famed Japanese drumming troupe Yamato has performed more than 4,000 shows for close to 8 million people across the world, having made numerous stops in Erie during those decades. Back again for 2025, their new show is sure to impress.

More than just a troupe, Yamato is an entire community: the musician-athletes live together in the Asuka Village in Japan, working to create their show from start to finish. Crafting the musical compositions, sets, light design, choreography, costumes, and more, the group constructs each part of their show to present an unforgettable experience.

"Yamato believes that the drumbeat, like the heartbeat, is the very pulse of life and the epitome of the Japanese spirit," says founder and artistic director Masa Ogawa. Playing more than 30 different Japanese drums along with other traditional instruments, each performance showcases the heart of each performer, "The drummers put their thoughts and spirits into each note — our final purpose is to connect to the heart of the audience."

Titled *Hito no Chikara — The Power of Human Strength*, the new program examines the relationship between humans, technology, and the rise of artificial intelligence. Ogawa ponders, "Will there ever be a machine that can play Taiko with unparalleled accu-



Feel the power of the Japanese drumming troupe Yamato as they return to Erie for one night only at the Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center at Mercyhurst University. Their new program, *Hito no Chikara — The Power of Human Strength*, is their most moving performance yet.

racy? Will advanced algorithms make them sound human-like?"

Although machines may one day learn enough to emulate human production, the possibility of it emulating human emotion feels nearly impossible — "We do not know when the end of humanity is, but we will strike until that moment," Ogawa declares. "The sounds struck by the heart, resonating with each other, will become *Hito no Chikara — The Power of Human Strength*." — Ally Kutz

7:30 p.m. // Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38th St. // \$30-\$55 // For tickets and info: call the box office at (814) 824-3000 or visit [miac.mercyhurst.edu](http://miac.mercyhurst.edu)

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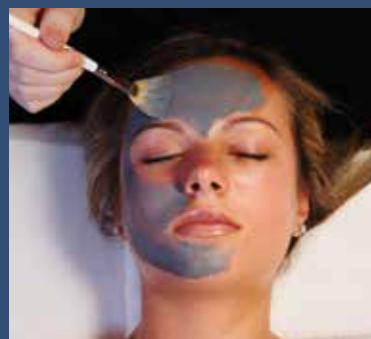
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## Looking for More Events?

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

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## Gem City Style: Best of Erie

An interview with Greg Straub, co-owner of Erie Apparel

By: Jessica Hunter

I recently had a chance to talk to Greg Straub, co-owner of Erie Apparel (featured on this issue's cover), the 2024 Best of Erie winner for Best Boutique. In our conversation, he reflects on his company's humble origins, what goes into a winning t-shirt design, unexpected milestones, and what's ahead.

**Jessica Hunter (JH):** Erie Apparel has been around for a little over 10 years. What inspired you to start Erie Apparel and how has your vision evolved over time? How did you move from e-commerce only to adding a brick and mortar?

**Greg Straub (GS):** At the time (2013-14), (co-owner) Pete (DiMichele) and I noticed a pretty large gap in the market for Erie-themed merch. We both had a few years away from Erie ourselves working in advertising, and thought we could give Erie Apparel a shot as a side hustle. In two short years we had reached our capacity to do this on nights and weekends, which led me to leaving my job and pursuing the business full-time. Our brick and mortar Flagship Store on West 12th Street followed shortly thereafter in 2017.

**JH:** How does Erie's culture and identity influence your designs? What do you believe has been the key to building such strong community support?

**GS:** Successful designs for us have been defined by finding common ground, which is to say, "What designs or themes interest the majority of our customers?" So the key really is to draw on our own experiences of being born and raised in Erie and do our best to share them in unique and creative ways, whether that be through highlighting Erie's most nostalgic "in-the-know" businesses, or just putting "Lake Erie" on a t-shirt for that tourist visiting for the first time.

**JH:** What challenges have you faced as a small business owner in Erie, and how do you overcome them?

JESSICA HUNTER



Greg Straub, co-owner of Erie Apparel (winner of 2024's Best Boutique) sat down with Jessica Hunter to discuss the origins of the business, how the shop has grown, and how the best parts of Erie turn into successful designs.

**GS:** Lots! We've been very lucky and fortunate to be kicking around this long! Retail in particular, in Erie or not, comes with highs and lows. Forecasting sales and deciding how and when to take risks are definitely the most difficult aspects. Overcoming them for us usually is data-driven. We're lucky Erie has some great people who love our items and local places that are far more established than us that are open to collab-

oration.

**JH:** Erie Apparel won Best Boutique — congratulations! How does winning the Best of Erie award impact your team and business? Can you share some other milestones that you are particularly proud of?

**GS:** Thank you! It's very cool and it serves our team as proof that our hard work is meaningful. It also is great social proof to someone who might be considering shopping with us for the first time to give us a chance. As far as milestones, we'll be celebrating 11 years in business this month, and we should (fingers crossed) reach half a million items sold (all-time) later this year, which continues to amaze me.

**JH:** What are your goals for Erie Apparel in the next five to 10 years? Are there any upcoming projects, collaborations, or collections that you are excited about?

**GS:** When's the next solar eclipse!? No, I think as far as goals we just want to continue to maintain what we have, and find interesting ways to expand our reach. We've learned Erieites are *everywhere*, but finding them can be a challenge! I can't speak about any imminent collaborations but yes, plenty to come from us this year and beyond!

**JH:** If you could describe Erie Apparel in three words, what would they be?

**GS:** Trying our best.

You can find all of Erie Apparel's award-winning designs at [erieapparel.co](http://erieapparel.co)

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

JESSICA HUNTER



Erie Apparel keeps a backstock of all of their bestsellers including the now famous "Erie Collage Tee" which features iconic local imagery like pepperoni balls, Greek sauce, Beach 6, and Ax Murder Hollow.



## Bird of the Month: Common Goldeneye

Eyes that light up winter

By: **Mary Birdsong**

My first encounter with Common Goldeneyes was a decade or more ago on a cold January day on Presque Isle Bay, when I was still learning the birds. A flock of duck-like birds flew over with an undulating auditory resonance. I could not identify this duck but this distinctive sound effect helped in my research to discover its name. I later learned that they are nicknamed “whistlers” by duck hunters.

Since then, I’ve become more advanced in my studies now that I actually work for the Erie Bird Observatory (which is a local organization that fosters enthusiasm for birds and conservation through ornithological research and public engagement), and this delightful diving duck is a seasonal favorite to see in the winter months on the open (but relatively protected) waters of Presque Isle or Thompson bays. They travel in small flocks, often mixed in with other waterfowl.

Their bright amber-colored eyes give this species its name and help distinguish them from other water birds that are in abundance in our area at this time of year. Those eyes are set in dark heads (green-black in males, chocolate brown in females). Other characteristics, called field marks, are the males’ distinctive round white patch between the eyes and the bill, and crisply delineated black and white feathers on its body. The females lack the facial patch and have a gray body with a white stripe along the flank.

Goldeneyes dive underwater for their food which is mostly aquatic invertebrates like crustaceans and mol-

lusks, but they can also eat seeds and fish. They submerge completely to search for food and the action they take to do that looks like a dive. Other ducks, like Mallards, “dabble” or just put their heads underwater to access food in shallow water.

Besides their glistening eyes and flying sound effects, the Common Goldeneye is an entertainer, too. The male’s courtship display is riveting to watch as they push their heads forward, pump them up and down and then fling them over their backs, bills open to emit a sharp, high-pitched squeak. It’s enough to impress females of all species!

From now until March is the perfect opportunity to catch these charming water birds and experience their engaging courtship displays, as long as the bay waters are not frozen. Erie Bird Observatory often offers free field trips in the fall and early spring to see the multitude of migrating waterfowl that make annual excursions through our area.

Bundle up, grab some binoculars and enjoy some winter birds!

*Mary Birdsong is the lead shorebird monitor for Erie Bird Observatory. Learn more at [eriebirdobservatory.org](http://eriebirdobservatory.org) or on their social media channels. She can be reached at [mbirdsong@eriereader.com](mailto:mbirdsong@eriereader.com)*

*Tip: The Erie County Public Library offers bird watching kits for check-out. These were provided by Presque Isle Audubon Society and contain adult and child-sized binoculars, a field guide, and a backpack.*



Our inaugural Bird of the Month for January is the Common Goldeneye. Local ornithological encyclopedia Mary Birdsong tells us all about how to spot (either by ear or eye) these beautiful aquatic birds this winter.

## ERIE’S HIDDEN TREASURE

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WIKIMEDIA COMMONS





**Vices // Neighbor Dan (split LP)**

*To All Those Who Do Not Exist Yet // Compositions From God's Grey Earth*  
Chumpire

★★★★★

Back in the 1990s and early 2000s when CDs and filesharing applications (Napster, Limewire, etc.) were the most popular methods of getting your music, vinyl records took a backseat, with only the underground scene keeping that medium alive. In doing so, many indie, punk, and hardcore acts were releasing split LPs, featuring four or five songs by two different artists, typically taking up one side each. Erie's newest Indie rock four piece Vices released their debut album *To All Those Who Do Not Exist Yet...* on one side, while emo post-punk/metal act Neighbor Dan (featuring members that live in Pennsylvania and Ohio) are on the other side with their *Compositions From God's Grey Earth*. The two bands are stylistically different, but are both rooted in the underground ethos, including some of the same influences. While Vices tends towards the melodic with their catchy lyrics and energetic rhythms (stand out tracks include "He/Said" and "Best Wishes"), Neighbor Dan leans into hardcore and metal with throaty vocal deliveries, angular rhythms, and prog breakdowns. Tracks like "The Ol' Clothes Horse" and "Hidden a Mouse" are a perfect blend of the old and new styles. — Larry Wheaton



**Cameron Winter**

*Heavy Metal*  
Partisan Records

★★★★★

In his first solo effort, Cameron Winter's idiosyncrasies flow with perfect delivery. 2024 was a big year for Winter before the announcement of his debut. As the frontman for Brooklyn rock band Geese, the musician spent most of the year touring, opening for acts like Greta Van Fleet and King Gizzard. However, touring did not stop the singer from his creative ventures. These on-the-road sessions bore fruit, becoming *Heavy Metal*. Announced and released with little fanfare, *Heavy Metal* immediately sets itself apart from Winter's projects with Geese. His traditional musical influences of Rolling Stones, Strokes, and Ween take a backseat in favor of singer-songwriters: the sounds of Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, and Tom Waits all hold space on this record. Even after taking inspiration from all these greats, Winter creates a wholly original project. Assisting in this oneness is the singer's unique vocal timbre. There is a level of unpredictability with his singing, making each word of his enigmatic lyrics a surprise on first listen. The album's production is equally astonishing. Whether the track consists of sparse piano and guitar plucking or channels '60s pop pastiche, each instrument is laid perfectly in the mix. Cameron Winter may, in his words, be a "heavy metal man," but his debut album soars with airy perfection. — Nathaniel Clark

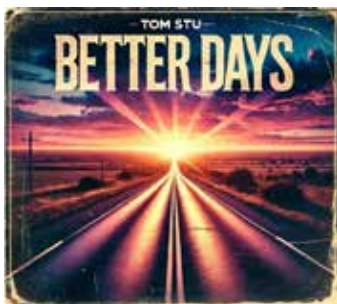


**Caleb Klauder & Reeb Willms**

*Gold in Your Pocket*  
Free Dirt Records

★★★★★

Some classic country and bluegrass fans are xenophobic towards artists located west of the Mississippi. Caleb Klauder and Reeb Willms have created a solid international reputation for themselves over the past 10+ years while being anchored in the oceanside conifers and high deserts of Washington state. These duets turn the listener towards the honest joys of love and memory. It braids together the soulful traditions of Nashville and Cajun sounds like sweetgrass. Multi-instrumentalist Klauder's dedication to the genre is pure. His vocals are expressive, nearly hedging on crooning. Like Hank Williams, he takes a listener to the best barn dances and tent revivals in the county with tunes like "He's Gone" and "Shame, Shame, Shame." Willms' genuine delivery reminds one of Lucinda Williams at her most gentle on "Sad Songs" or a melancholy Iris Dement on "Last of My Kind." Their harmonies are as golden and forgiving as Gram Parsons with Emmylou Harris. They have wisely surrounded themselves with other gifted musicians like Joel Savoy and Chris Scruggs. Fiddle runs work as a third story-teller. Pedal steel guitar weeps and whirls as mandolin brightens. Rhythms chug along with shuffles and swings. This album is timelessly charismatic and honestly authentic. It reminds us there is no shame in remaining tender during tough times. — Melissa Sullivan Shimek



**Tom Stu**

*Better Days*  
Self-released

★★★★★

Beautiful, intimate, and wonderfully catchy, the debut album from Tom Stu (aka Tom Stuczynski) is impressive. I'd be hard-pressed to think of many other local releases that I'd rather hear around a campfire or a living room amongst friends and family. With just a few layers of acoustic guitars and some echoey vocal overdubs (not to mention a guest spot from his sister, the great Claire Stuczynski on the track "Beautiful Sky"), Stuczynski creates an inviting and rich atmosphere that you'll be happy to drop in on. This folksy pop sound continues to captivate generations of singer-songwriters and it's easy to see why. Stuczynski's lyrics are nostalgic and sentimental, free of cynicism. One could trace his vocal delivery as a blend of *Punk Goes Acoustic* and John Mayer, Jack Johnson, or Dave Matthews, mixed with more modern sensibilities. With nine tracks totaling 38 minutes, it's a sweet, easy-to-digest meal that will leave you with a blissful aftertaste. For a relatively new artist, this album feels rustic and lived-in, with care and attention given to each note and phrase throughout. — Nick Warren



## Rental House

Author Weike Wang exceptional in lending intrigue to unexceptional circumstances

It is not often an author is able to write mundane, relatively normal people leading relatively normal lives in a way that pulls you in from the first chapter, but Weike Wang excels in this style and has done it again in her latest novel, *Rental House*.

The novel follows a young married couple, Keru and Nate, who met in college and married despite their very different familial backgrounds — Keru’s parents are Chinese immigrants for whom perfection is the only goal, while Nate’s parents are rural, white, working-class folks who do not see eye-to-eye with his am-

possible, while Nate’s family operates in a way that, at times, can seem reckless. With both Keru and Nate struggling to maintain their strained relationships with their own parents, they also have to contend with the difficulties of trying (and ultimately failing) to relate to their in-laws.

Their second vacation, alone in the Catskills, introduces a new strain on their relationship when they’re interrupted by multiple outsiders, including an Eastern European couple staying nearby as well as Nate’s brother and his girlfriend showing up unannounced.

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It is not often an author is able to write mundane, relatively normal people leading relatively normal lives in a way that pulls you in from the first chapter, but Weike Wang excels in this style and has done it again in her latest novel, *Rental House*.

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bitions.

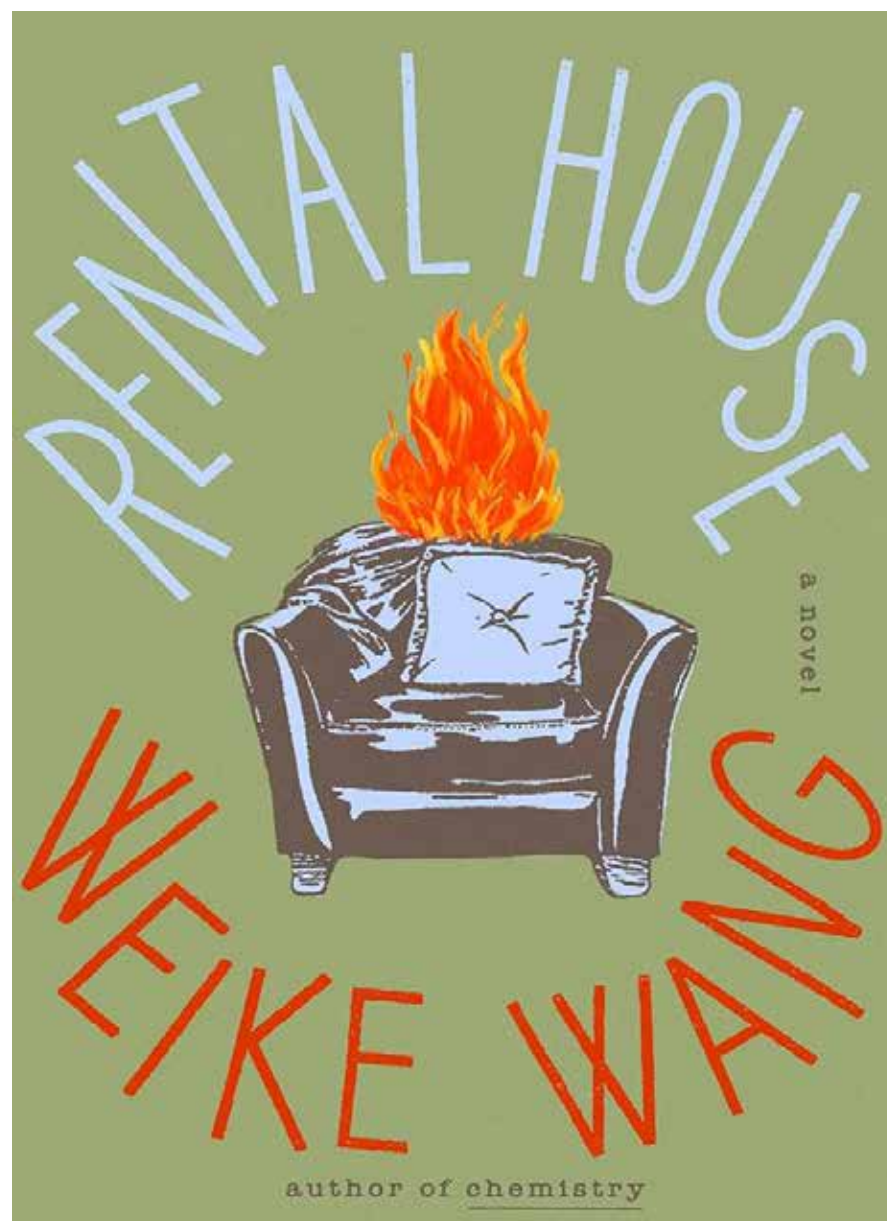
The story unfolds over the course of two vacations, five years apart — the first in which Keru and Nate’s parents separately visit a Cape Cod bungalow where the couple are staying (one parental group leaving before the other arrives), and a second in which the couple vacation alone in the Catskills.

The stark differences between the parents is immediately noticeable — Keru’s parents are cautious in a post-COVID world, taking as many precautions as

Wang excellently blends the mundanity of these vacations with the internal struggle each of the characters feels — Keru’s struggle as an immigrant who came to the U.S. as a child, Nate’s struggle of wanting to intellectually better himself, and the struggle of both when dealing with their parents and the outsiders who disrupt the flow of their lives.

— Ally Kutz

224 pages // Riverhead Books // Contemporary Fiction



## 2025 CREATIVE CROWD

**New in 2025:** Creative Crowd is a quarterly meetup for artists, arts educators, and creative entrepreneurs. Join us from 5:30 - 7:30 PM for an evening of networking, inspiration, and fun. No RSVP required!

Scan QR code or visit us online at [erieartsandculture.org](http://erieartsandculture.org) for this year's schedule.





# CALENDAR

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**Fri 1/10**

**Featured**



**Erie Otters vs. Saginaw Spirit**  
@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena



**Sat 1/11**

**Erie Otters vs. Sarnia Sting**  
@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena

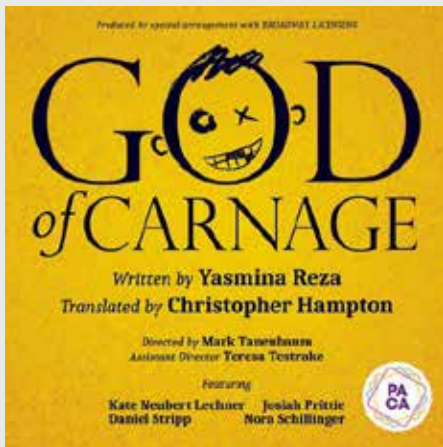
**Thu 1/16**

**Disney On Ice presents Into the Magic**  
@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena

**Fri 1/17**

**Disney On Ice presents Into the Magic**  
@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena

**Featured**



**God of Carnage**  
@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street



**Sat 1/18**

**Disney On Ice presents Into the Magic**  
@ 11am  
Erie Insurance Arena

**Disney On Ice presents Into the Magic**  
@ 3pm  
Erie Insurance Arena

**God of Carnage**  
@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

**Featured**



**Eat, Drink, and be Merry Stand-Up Comedy Show at Madeline's Dining**  
@ 7pm / \$45-\$55  
Madeline's Dining and Events, 8844 Pennsylvania 18, Cranesville



**Sun 1/19**

**Disney On Ice presents Into the Magic**  
@ 11am  
Erie Insurance Arena

**Disney On Ice presents Into the Magic**  
@ 3pm  
Erie Insurance Arena

**Mon 1/20**

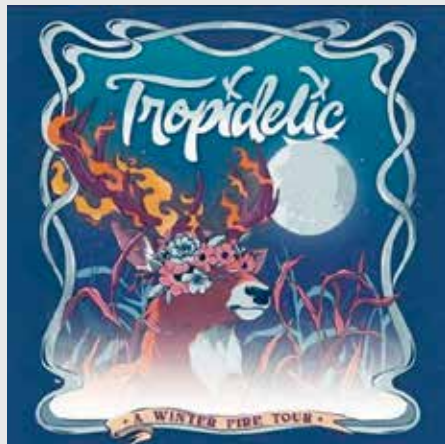
**Disney On Ice presents Into the Magic**  
@ 12pm  
Erie Insurance Arena

**Thu 1/23**

**God of Carnage**  
@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

**Fri 1/24**

**Featured**



**King's Rook Club Presents: TROPIDELIC!**  
@ 7pm / \$26  
King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street



**Erie Otters vs. Niagara IceDogs**

@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena

**God of Carnage**  
@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

**Sat 1/25**

**Erie Otters vs. Kitchener Rangers**  
@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena

**God of Carnage**  
@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

**Fri 1/31**

**God of Carnage**  
@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

**Sat 2/01**

**Featured**



**Race to Remember**  
@ 9:30am / Free-\$25  
1135 Lake St, Girard



**Featured**



**Experience Curling!**  
@ 7pm / \$30  
LECOM Sports Park, 8159 Oliver Road



**God of Carnage**  
@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

**Sun 2/02**

**God of Carnage**  
@ 2pm / \$20

PACA, 1505 State Street

**Tue 2/04**

**Featured**



**Erie Otters vs. Guelph Storm**  
@ 11am  
Erie Insurance Arena



**Fri 2/07**

**Featured**



**LADIES NIGHT!! Karaoke/Open Mic HOSTED BY DJ JAY! A JenJen birthday special!**  
@ 9pm / \$2  
King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street



Calendar information is provided by event organizers. All events are subject to change or cancellation. This publication is not responsible for the accuracy of the information contained in this calendar.



## Babygirl Gives New Meaning to Guilty Pleasure

Are you lost?



Romance movies have been more upfront in the last decade in portraying the intricacies of kink and BDSM. Unfortunately, some of the most popular films in the subgenre seem to forget the three most important parts of these relationships: “Safe, Sane, and Consensual.” Halina Reijn’s (*Bodies Bodies Bodies*) new film *Babygirl* dives into the psychology of wanting this kind of relationship but unlike films like *50 Shades of Grey* (bad) and *365 Days* (even worse), it does so in a mature, thoughtful manner that makes for some fascinating viewing.

Romy (Nicole Kidman) is an overworked CEO for a warehouse automation company who is rich, powerful, and living a seemingly happy life with her two daughters and husband Jacob (Antonio Banderas). However, something is missing in her life. The pressures of her job and family lead her into finding a way of letting go of her responsibilities. She finds this in Samuel (Harris Dickinson), her much younger intern, when the two enter a relationship that allows her to relinquish all control to him. This relationship



is exactly what she’s been looking for, but it could cause her to lose everything.

The film succeeds in dealing with the nuances of dominance and submission and the power dynamics involved in kink, and without psychoanalyzing her characters, Reijn gets into the internal reasoning behind these kinds of desires (it is interesting to learn that Romy grew up in a cult). Without spoiling anything,

the ending wraps things up a little too neatly for a story like this, but seeing kink portrayed in such a smart, adult manner is very refreshing. — Forest Taylor

*Written and directed by Helina Reijn // Starring: Nicole Kidman, Harris Dickinson, Sophie Wilde, Esther-Rose McGregor, Vaughan Reilly, Victor Slezak, Leslie Silva, Molly Price, and Antonio Banderas // 115 minutes // A24 // Rated R*

## Nosferatu is a New Take on an Old Tale

A symphony of horror



Few stories have had more cinematic adaptations than Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, but the first and still one of the best is F. W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu*. It seemed natural that Robert Eggers, one of the best horror directors working today, would take a crack at it, but the question is: how can he differentiate from Murnau’s 1922 classic that was already remade once in 1979 by Werner Herzog? He does with his own dazzling visual style and mastery of period-accurate details, as well as some committed performances.

In Germany in 1838, young Thomas Hutter (Nicholas Hoult) travels to the Carpathian Mountains to finalize a land deal with the mysterious Count Orlock (Bill Skarsgard). The locals all fear the count and Hutter soon realizes why as Orlock keeps him trapped in his castle and heads to Germany with his heart set on claiming Hutter’s young bride Ellen (Lily-Rose Depp) as his own.

Naturally, Eggers imbues this Gothic tale with an all-encompassing sense of dread thanks to his ingenious use of natural lighting, heavy shadows, and unsettling editing and sound effects. His other



secret weapon is Skarsgard who, rather than mimic Max Schreck or Klaus Kinski, gives us his own unique take on the count. No tragic doomed romantic figure here. Skarsgard’s Orlock is a monster through and through, and the film is all the better for it.

Sadly, all this visual splendor can’t make up for a story that gives us no real surprises. It’s the *Dracula* story all over again. It’s disappointing for a director whose previous stories have been so refreshingly original, but when a film looks

this good, we can forgive the predictable plot. —Forest Taylor

*Written and directed by Robert Eggers // Inspired by the original screenplay by Henrik Galeen and the novel Dracula by Bram Stoker // Starring Bill Skarsgard, Lily-Rose Depp, Nicholas Hoult, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Emma Corrin, Ralph Ineson, Simon McBurney, Adela Heszova, Milena Konstantinova, and Willem Dafoe // Focus Features // 132 minutes // Rated R*

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## FEATURE

### Edwina Tries... Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meats

Best loved of the Best of Erie winners

By: Edwina Capozziello

If you live in or around Erie you've likely heard of Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meats at 310 E. 24th St. (winner of 2024's Best of Erie Best Neighborhood Grocer and Best Deli). The family business, in its current location since 1958, has roots dating back to the mid-1930s. It is currently run by brothers Andrew and Gerry and is absolutely legendary to generations of people.

But have you been to Urbaniaks? It's an experience that I highly recommend although admittedly, it can feel daunting at first. Until recently I had only been there a couple of times as an observer with customers who had grown up in the neighborhood and knew what to do. I recall my (then tiny) children being smitten with the place when they were offered samples of the best beef jerky they had ever had.

I have long wanted to go back, finally did return, and I'm not sure what took me so long.

The main section has two large counters, one on each side. One has fresh, raw meat selections and the other has deli meats, cheeses, sausages, salads, and many more pre-made items. There's a small bakery counter that was recently vacated by Herb & Honey Bakery, as they prepare to move into a bigger shop at West Fifth and Cherry. It's a bustling and busy place, even on a weekday.

The selection is tidy and expansive, the staff is knowledgeable and helpful — but be forewarned: they pride themselves on efficiency. Take your number and be ready when they call you. If you're dilly-dallying, they will go on to the next number. That does not mean there is not time for smiles, conversation, product questions, and general niceties. I had a lovely time during my visit. The gentleman being served ahead of me was getting a nice selection of sausage delicacies and asked the woman behind the counter if she could guess his background based on them, to which she replied with a big grin, "I'd guess you're Polish but I'm Italian and I love this stuff too!" The clientele of the market obviously come from all walks of life and everyone seems happy to be there. They even have merch!

I left with a grin of my own, a bag of cheeses, a pound of meat sticks, and a hug from a friend's dad who I ran into during my adventure. If you've never been, take a number, and give it a try. I promise you won't be disappointed.

For more info, visit: [urbaniakbrothers.com](http://urbaniakbrothers.com)

Edwina is Erie's (self-proclaimed) biggest fan who loves being a tourist in our own town. If you have an idea of something new she should try you can email her at [edwina.capozziello@gmail.com](mailto:edwina.capozziello@gmail.com)



Contributing writer Edwina Capozziello becomes a tourist in her own town as she visits new-to-her places and tries new-to-her things. This month, she visits the long-standing, legendary, Best of Erie-winning Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meat and hopes that you'll feel inspired to do the same.

## SSJ Neighborhood Network is turning 25!

As we approach 25 years of service, we are filled with gratitude for the lives and neighborhoods we've transformed with your help.

### 25th Anniversary Matching Appeal

In honor of our milestone year, gifts made during our Anniversary Appeal will be matched dollar-for-dollar up to \$25,000 by generous SSJNN supporters. This means your gift will have double the impact for our neighbors in need.

### Will You Help Us Celebrate?

- 1. Make a Donation:** Every dollar you give will go twice as far in supporting our mission.
- 2. Increase our Match:** Pledge a larger gift in 2025 to increase our Anniversary Match. Our new Legacy Giving\* fund provides an exciting opportunity to sustain our neighborhood work for the future. \*Please call Jenn Kennedy (814) 454-7814 x 206

Help Make Our  
25th Anniversary  
Unforgettable!



[www.ssjnn.org/donate](http://www.ssjnn.org/donate)



# DOBAR GENIMET

BY BRAD PATNULO  
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GERBLE I TENEFUX OT  
MUPP WAKLY BORBANFLET  
GRUN SORKUB E FLIXEN  
TROB G'HUUL PREGA...

PUMR INDOA RAHR

G'HOUIN GUA  
OSM PHINCE GHURZ  
E THE TANIERT...

SOUZA GLUP  
ENIFLECK RO  
MAZSULAR  
BRCK

# JUST TOYIN' WITCHA — BY B. TOY



# Fish that Talk in Artist's Block

by JOHN BAVARO

I'LL CALL THIS  
'MORNING COFFEE WITH  
TWO DAYS LEFT  
BEFORE MY DEADLINE'

I wonder if with global  
warming, whether I could  
make a joke about  
Eskimos coming down to  
Erie PA to purchase  
some gently used snow.

Yeah, maybe  
you could have  
a salesman  
kick the tires.

Or what if M. Night Shyamalan  
made a horror film about the  
growing U.S. budget deficit.  
That would be a real banger!

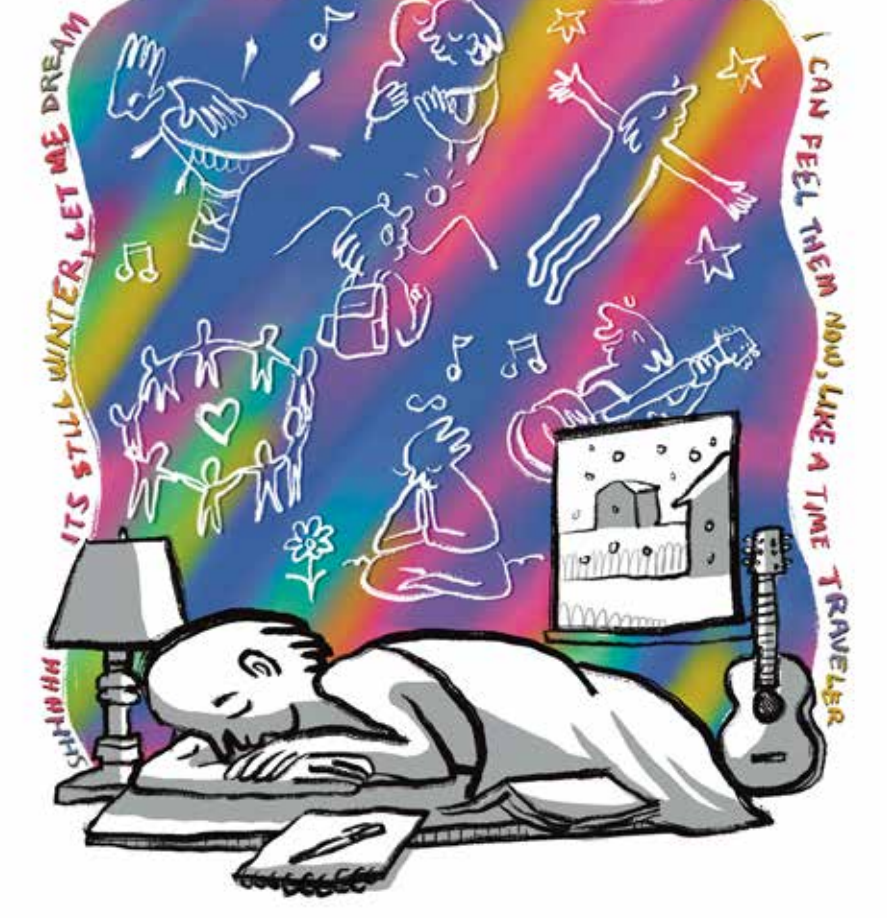
Shyamala-alama!

Or a joke about  
rainbows being "heavy"  
instead of "light." Would  
that be too subtle?

rise and shine!

©bavaro

# FRIDGE COMICS BY Anthony @ant's art house





## The Erie Cook Book Revisited: Snow Fritters

Add in a literal cup of snow for unique Erie treat

By: Morgan Yezzi

MORGAN YEZZI

As New York has bagels, so Erie has snow fritters. The original recipe provided in Laura Sterrett's 1881 *The Erie Cookbook* was, as written, stodgy as old boots — so I added leavener to give them life. Now they're as light as freshly fallen snow. Nothing like a historical recipe with a locally-sourced (and snowy sky-delivered) ingredient to kick off the new year in a flurry of flavor.

This recipe yields 16—20 fritters.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 2 cups AP flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teacup of *new fallen* snow
- 4 cups lard
- Dusting of granulated sugar

To make Snow Fritters, whisk together buttermilk and egg in a large mixing bowl. Add sugar rubbed with orange zest and stir to combine. In a separate bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Gradually add the dry ingredients to the wet mixture, stirring until just combined. After the ingredients are combined, gently fold in a tea-

One ingredient that Erie never seems to be short on is freshly fallen snow – scoop up a teacup full and add it to this historic local recipe for “Snow Fritters” to create a light, airy, lake effect nugget of golden brown on a blustery wintery day.

cup-full of *new fallen* snow.

Heat lard (or any other fat of your choosing) in a deep pot or fryer to 375°F (190°C). Drop spoonfuls of batter, about the size of a chestnut, into the hot lard. Fry in batches for 3 minutes, turning as needed, until golden brown. Remove the fritters with

a slotted spoon and drain on a metal rack. Serve warm, with a light dusting of granulated sugar for a frosty finish.

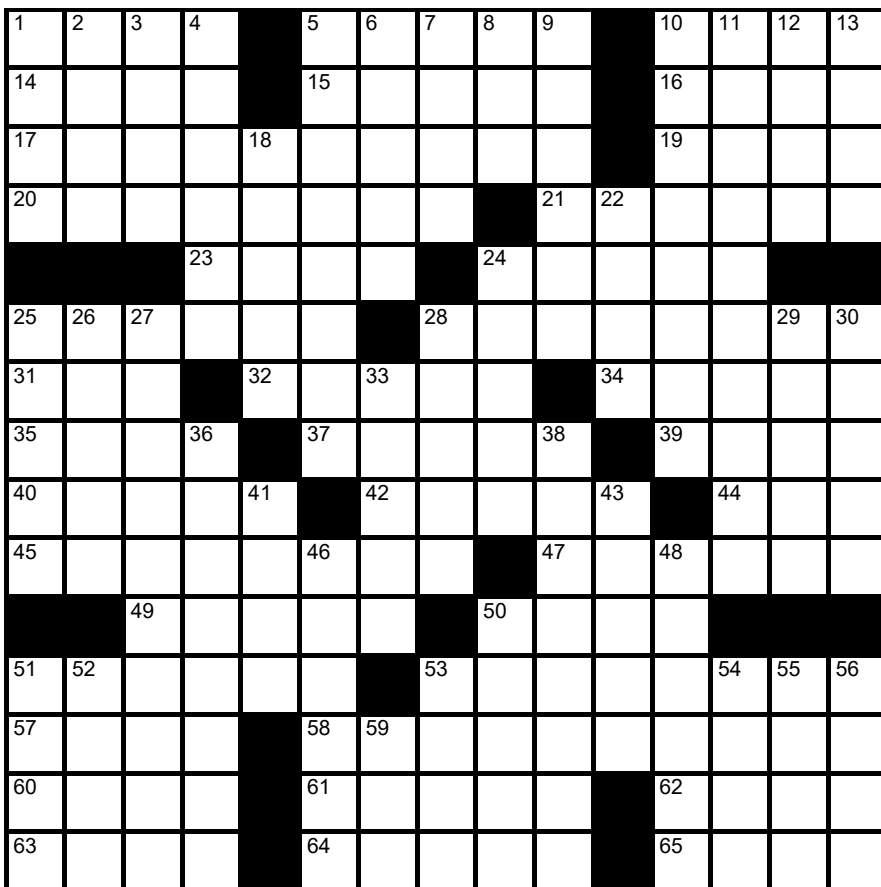
Revised from Laura Sterrett's recipe for “Snow Fritters” from page 88 in *The Erie Cookbook*.

## TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK





# CROSSWORD



## Across

1. McEntire of "Happy's Place"
5. Backup idea
10. Racetrack gait
14. Alternatives to lagers
15. Indian currency
16. Water conveyor
17. Group of British whales covered in Band-Aids?
19. "You \_\_\_" (Burger King ad campaign)
20. Outdoor dining arrangement
21. Chinese zodiac sign
23. Accelerated
24. Dog-walker's item
25. Prescription sleep aid
28. Word sung before "dear [insert name here]"
31. "La \_\_\_" (Debussy opus)
32. Celery portion
34. Spine-tingling
35. \_\_\_-Z (old Camaro model)
37. Swung around a pivot
39. Take time off
40. Head & Shoulders target
42. Inherited factors
44. Actor Mahershala
45. Secluded spot
47. "\_\_\_... on the side of my face" (line from

## Clue

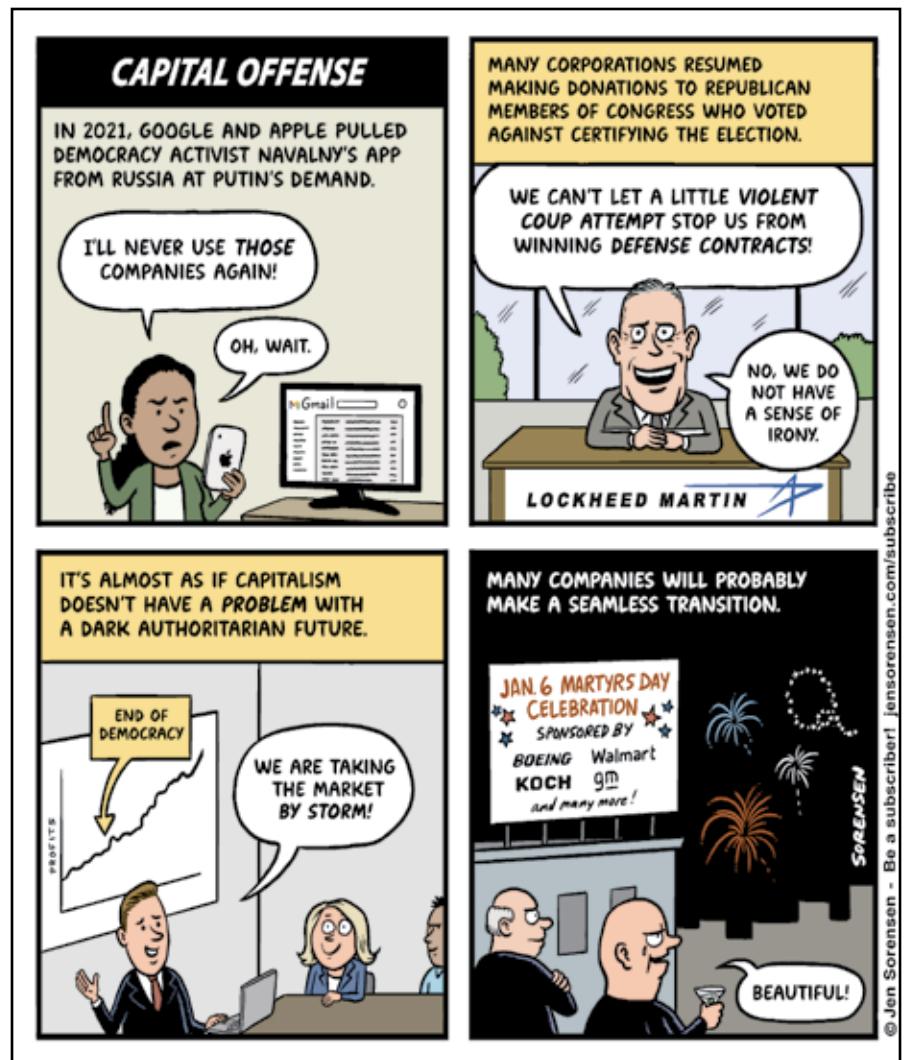
49. Cow, in Cannes
50. Equipment
51. Pyongyang's country, in some headlines
53. Shout at some parties
57. Overnight \_\_\_
58. What to do in the search bar to get the latest scores?
60. One T of "ST:TNG"
61. Tiniest bit
62. Vacillate
63. Crafter's website
64. Cowboy's catcher
65. Till filler

## Down

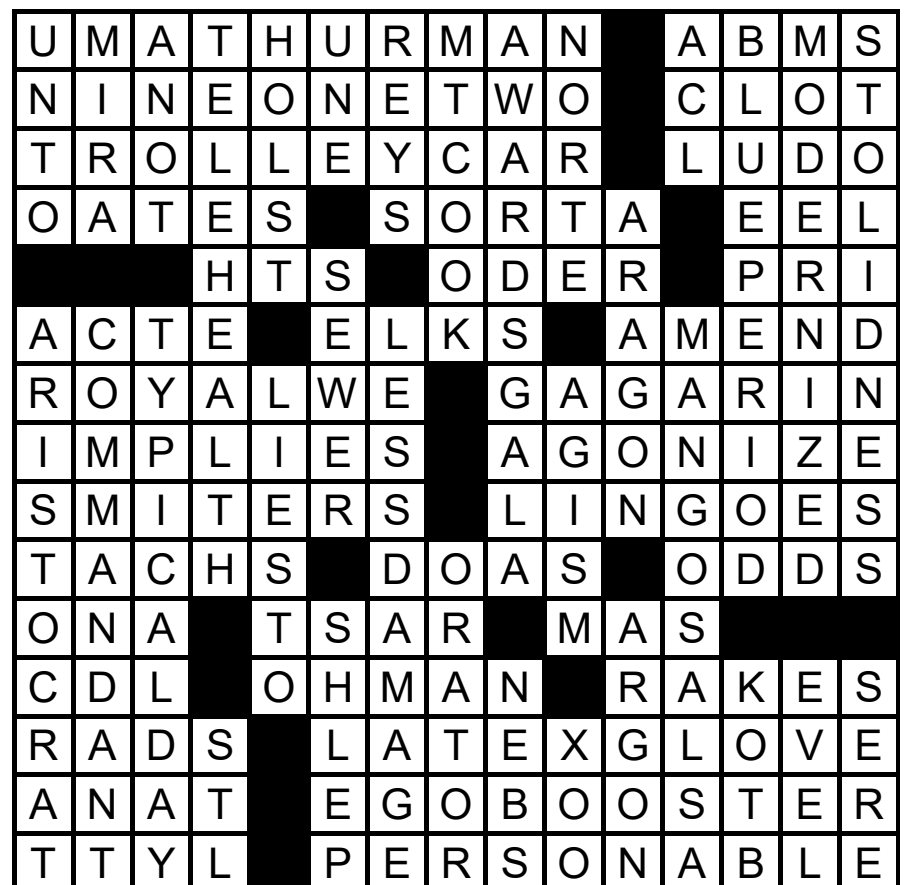
1. "Mean Girls" star Renee
2. Late "First Lady of Children's Folk Songs" Jenkins
3. Rhythm
4. St. Francis's home
5. Puts forward
6. Drawn in
7. Scheduled mtg.
8. "The Matrix" protagonist
9. Two-\_\_\_ (apartment spec, slangily)
10. Classic skateboarding magazine
11. Nightmare that keeps

you tossing and turning?

12. 1952 Olympics host city
13. Prom attendee, usually
18. Overdrinks
22. Taxi posting
24. Compare (to)
25. "Weird AI" Yankovic's "\_\_\_ Paradise"
26. Thanks, in Quebec
27. Ballots using really wide sheets of paper?
28. Bandit's kid
29. Supermarket section
30. Some coolers
33. Aquarium growth
36. Cloudless forecast
38. Lets have the last word
41. Treasure hunter's step
43. Acronym for a lawsuit filed to silence or intimidate opponents
46. "\_\_\_ it be?"
48. Dry creek bed
50. Shot
51. Memo
52. Mario \_\_\_ (Nintendo series)
53. Aquatherapy locales
54. Press clothes
55. Eyelid nuisance
56. Those, to Jose
59. "Motion approved"



## Answers to last puzzle







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