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ERIE READER

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YEAR IN REVIEW

LOOKING BACK ON 2024



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From the Editor

SNOVID-24

How's everyone holding up?

Boy, has that been the question of the last six weeks or so. In November's edition of From the Editors, I was but a sweet, summer child — truly believing in my soul that Harris would win the election, and believing this while I was enjoying lovely, sunny, 60-degree autumn strolls about my neighborhood.

How much can change in the span of a few weeks? Apparently way too much.

Shortly after we all collectively learned that we'd have to endure yet another Trump presidency, we were hit with a winter storm the likes of which have been seldom seen in Erie before — we officially surpassed the single-day snowfall record and the governor had to call in the National Guard. I mean, even for Erie, this was pretty nuts.

After day four or so of being unable to leave my house, eating nothing but Thanksgiving leftovers, and having to write the behemoth, 5,000-word Year in Review for this issue with my children home from school asking me for snacks every 10 minutes — I was having straight up traumatic flashbacks to 2020's COVID lockdown. And I'm sure I'm not the only one.

If you're feeling a bit like Kevin McAllister in *Home Alone* after this past week (featured on our cover this month, created by the incomparable Nick Warren), fending off Snowmageddon, armed only with a shovel and some hair dryers, you're not alone. They even made a shirt about it — get yours (and a few for your loved ones) at (my personal wardrobe supplier) Erie Apparel. And while you're at it, go ahead and get everything local all the time! This snowstorm didn't just psychologically damage niche content writers — so many of our local small businesses lost a lot during a time of year they usually depend on to get a little bit ahead. Buy local or it's bye, local — read more on this from local business owners within.

So somehow, I did, in fact, succeed at writing our Year in Review, despite the inconvenient living situation, and it is featured herein. In it, I look back at Erie's year economically, politically, artistically, educationally, environmentally, and Reader-ly. We have accomplished a lot, grown collectively as a community, and we should be proud — a solid, helpful, generous community is going to become increasingly more important as we move into the uncertain future and Erie has a strong one. We saw this on display, not only in all of the aforementioned categories, but in neighbors helping neighbors through this snowstorm — shoveling out driveways, digging out cars, offering rides to work, or to pick up groceries. Small acts of positivity and kindness, that when all performed together, en masse, truly make a community strong.

So that's that. As we wrap up 2024, all of us here at the Reader want to say happy holidays and happy new year!

How Did This Happen? Democrats and Republicans Swap Bases

A look at the 2024 election results, locally and nationally

By: Jeff Bloodworth

Democrats did not see the rising tide. Sam Talarico, chair of the Erie County Democrats, termed himself “somewhat shocked” by Kamala Harris’ defeat. His vice chair, Kristy Gnibus, “for sure” thought Harris could win. Both felt the same energy. Harris packed Erie Insurance Arena. Liz Cheney spoke at the largest paid educational program in Erie history. Ultimately, Gnibus, like so many other Democrats, simply believed. “There is no way a person could look at Trump and think, he’s good for America.”

Voters thought otherwise.

On election day, Jim Wertz, the Democratic candidate for Pennsylvania State Senate District 49, sensed a surge in Erie’s crowded voting precincts. He could not divine which way the tide would break. He later told me of Trump’s win, “I call it a tide, [because] you can see a wave coming.” Whatever its source, Donald Trump’s red tide was simply too high for the Democratic seawall. Rolling to 312 Electoral Votes and nearing 50 percent of the popular vote, the Republican improved on his 2020 vote share in 49 states and 90 percent of American counties. In this, Erie delivered once again as a political bellwether.

The county’s 1.3 percent swing toward Trump mirrored the Commonwealth’s 1.6 percent move to the Republican and his 2 to 3-point gain in the national vote.

But Trump’s deepest cut hits Democrats to their core. For generations, voters had identified Democrats as the “party of the working class” and Republicans as the advocates of big business and elites. In 2024, those identities have flipped.

Harris won the college-educated by 14 points. She also took those earning \$100,000 or more.

Trump, meanwhile, is the first-ever Republican presidential candidate to win a majority of low-income voters. Trump also took the Republican’s highest percentage of Asian voters since 2004, the biggest share of the Black vote since 1976, and the party’s second-highest portion of Hispanics ever. Trump’s GOP is (gulp) a multi-racial working-class coalition.

More than a victory, Trump stole the Democrats’ lunch money by taking the party’s very identity.

Powering this coalition are men. Proof of this is both anecdotal and in the data.

Nationally, Trump won the male vote by 10 points — and he did so by luring young, irregular male voters to the polls. Erie’s eye popping 75 percent voter turnout included many newly registered men. At my precinct, two scraggly 20-something boys queued behind me and sheepishly asked for help admitting, “we never voted before.” Talarico heard similar reports from an array of election workers. Such voters elude psephologists. On election day they emerge and make pollsters, yet again, look foolish. More “Trump” voter than Republican, they cast a ballot for president and often leave everything below blank. In Arizona,



Trump has honed in on the ability to switch the narrative and gather working-class voters into the Republican camp — traditionally, working-class voters identified as Democrats while Republicans were identified as the advocates of big business and elites. In 2024, those identities have flipped. Jeff Bloodworth looks at this factor among others, as an explanation of why the 2024 election followed the Trump tide.

Nevada, Michigan, and Wisconsin, Trump voters arrived for the main course but ignored the down ballot sides. Trump won the state, but a series of Democratic senators eked to victory.

In the ashes of defeat, Gnibus understands that voters are telling Democrats “We aren’t voting for more politicians.” The vice chair admits, “She [Harris] is the status quo of what a politician is. They [the voters] want to vote for an anti-establishment candidate.” Empathizing with voters, Gnibus sees why so many are “sick of hearing the promises of the Democratic Party” without seeing the results in their daily lives and paychecks.

Lindsey Scott sees the Democrats’ woes similarly. The chair of the Crawford County Democratic Party calls Harris and other Democratic candidates “front of the classroom kids with front of the classroom personalities.” Scott knows that being the smartest kid in the room “doesn’t get you elected.” Whenever the smart kids raise their hands, voters groan, “There they go again.” Just like high school, Scott believes people prefer “the back of the room” where those “who are part of the jokes [and] rowdiness” slouch.

Donald Trump proved Scott’s analogy. Kamala Harris had the policies, the Nobel laureates, and even the Swifties. In September, she defenestrated Trump in a presidential debate. The Republican nominee, by way of contrast, shimmied to a bizarre 39-minute medley of Guns n’ Roses and Broadway showtunes. He followed that campaign event with a crude and xenophobic Madison Square Garden rally during which

speakers termed Harris “the devil” and Puerto Rico a “floating island of garbage.” None of it mattered. Harris took the under-30 set and tied Trump with those 65 and older. But Generation X went Trump by 10 points, 54 percent to 44 percent.

In this 21st century *Breakfast Club*, John Bender steamrolled Claire Standish. The back of the classroom, anti-establishment prevailed over the preps and the plastics.

If life were the John Hughes’ film *Pretty in Pink*, liberals would conceive of themselves as the plucky underdog, Duckie. But Democratic candidate for Colorado state legislature Adam Frisch explained why many middle- to lower-class voters, of all races, see Democrats as Hughes’ stuck-up antagonists, Steff and Blane. He made national news in 2022 by nearly unseating Lauren Boebert. In 2024, he came up short in his House race, again.

In driving 77,000 miles across his rural Colorado district, Frisch met many voters. But a 60-something electrician sticks in his mind. Denver and Colorado’s ski towns are booming. But northwest Colorado, much like western Pennsylvania, has been rocked by an economy in transition. Adding to this are state regulations pushed by ski-town elites to end all oil and gas drilling. As admirable as this may be, these policies hit hard in counties where 70 percent of GDP is derived from energy production.

Frisch said of his electrician, “He knows there is a climate crisis over the next 20 years, but he has to pay his rent in 20 days.” In years past, the electrician

made six figures in Colorado's oil and gas industry. Today, he earns one-third that income in his \$17-an-hour job at a mom-and-pop motel. Frisch faults "the cultural demagoguery of the high and mighty" for "stripping the guy's dignity." Fuming, he blames the jet-setting Steffs and Blanes "who use five times the energy per capita than the men and women digging it out of the ground" for priming a voter revolt that elected Trump.

Far from blaming Kamala Harris, Frisch told me, "Only in politics is stating the obvious so rare." In July, he made Washington Post headlines by calling for Joe Biden to step down as the Democratic nominee. Ironically, Frisch made a national splash by stating the glaringly evident: Biden was too old. And in this, we see the Democrats' real dilemma and Trumpism's appeal.

Donald Trump freely admits his political larceny. He tells voters that elites are corrupt and then proves it by his own actions. Republican officeholders privately complain but remain silent to safeguard their political future; in this, they affirm Trump's point: elites put themselves first.

In 2022, Democrats had the chance to disprove Trump's populist critique. Voters, according to every survey, begged Biden to step aside. Biden and Democratic leaders incessantly bellowed that Trump represented an existential threat to democracy. Polls showed the president would lose a rematch. If Democratic elites truly believed their words and put the

country first, they would have followed Congressman Dean Phillips. The little-known Minnesotan challenged Biden in the primaries. He put the nation above self-interest — and lost his political career. Every other Democratic officeholder in Washington proved Trump correct: self-interest came before country.

Trump is morally challenged. He is appointing a clown car of bad actors to his Cabinet. But unlike the Democrats in Washington, he is honest about who and what he is.

Gnibus told me "The people surrounding Biden didn't want to get out [of the White House]. They dragged their feet in favor of careerism. The voters are right not to trust politicians."

Lester Levine, founder of Common Good Govern-

ing, sees this as well. He understands that Trump capitalizes on public sentiment that Washington has too many politicians and not enough servant leaders, a concept he defines as "individuals who want to put the real needs of the country ahead of party and/or ideology."

Had Biden stepped aside in 2022, Democratic primary voters could have picked a political lemon. But Democrats would have demonstrated that Trump was wrong. Elites, even presidents, *can* put the country ahead of self-interest. Ultimately, Trump's brand is a political nihilism that tells every American "go get what's yours, and the hell with everyone else." Tragically, Washington Democrats did just that.

Trump is morally challenged. He is appointing a clown car of bad actors to his Cabinet. But unlike the Democrats in Washington, he is honest about who and what he is.

Gnibus has her interpretation of the 2024 election. She told me, "People are sick of it." They want "an everyday person message not an everyday politician message: a real change agent." That change should start with some honesty. Trump won because Democrats lost their working-class identity and Washington elites value their careers over country. The truth hurts. But it also sets you free.

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

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Country Fair

Buy Local or It's Bye, Local!

How an ill-timed winter storm is impacting local businesses

By: Jeff McCullor

What happens when an entire community's collection of small businesses have a weekend effectively erased from their calendar? Especially when the weekend in question is potentially the biggest string of shopping days for the entire retail sales season?

Well, it's bad.

Small business owners are resilient. It's part of the job description. They choose to endure challenge after challenge instead of working for the man, opting to actualize their dreams while enhancing the local economy. The emotional highs can be high and the lows can be quite low. Throw a global pandemic at them and they endure. Record-high inflation? They begrudgingly roll with it.

But a freak snowstorm on Thanksgiving weekend has the small business community reeling. The timing was awful — a debilitating weather event coincided with the jumpstart to holiday shopping and most importantly Small Business Saturday, the national "Shop Small" event heavily marketed by American Express. Snowfall totals vary by neighborhood but at least two feet of snow hit the ground with more accumulation arriving on subsequent days, sometimes at an impressive clip of two inches per hour. It was a storm so impactful that as of this writing the area's public and private snow maintenance services are still working through the initial cleanup.

The Black Friday storm threw Lavery Brewing Company an avalanche-sized curveball, a microbrewery and pub normally open seven days a week for lunch and dinner service. Jason Lavery, co-owner and founding brewer, had to shut down operations early on Black Friday and fully shutter the business the following Saturday and Sunday. He estimates he missed out on roughly \$15,000 in revenue. "Traditionally this is one of, if not the busiest, weekends of the year for us. Families come back into town and a lot of folks go out to celebrate," he says, and "One thousand hospitality workers received zero tips all weekend."

Mother Nature proved to be a point of frustration

JEFF MCCULLOR



Local brewery and bar owner Jeff McCullor implores the Erie community to pull out all the stops in their support of all things local – the massive snowfall compromised the post-Thanksgiving boom most small businesses rely on this time of year.

and stress for another business on Erie's west side. The Six Pack House of Beer on Pittsburgh Avenue is in a similar situation with safety on the owners' minds constantly weighed against profitability and sustainability of the business.

"Is there a right decision to make in closing or staying open? Some of our employees are paycheck-to-paycheck. If we err on the side of safety and close for the day, they don't earn anything. But if we open up, we generate extra expenses and run the risk of zero customers showing up because of the crazy conditions. It's mentally exhausting," co-owner Alice DeGeorge said.

She continued, "There's definitely a level of guilt because our decisions during this time affect so many people money-wise, including us. We have gone as far as to pick up and take home employees that can't make it in otherwise, but then of course we wonder if it's really worth it at the end of the night."

Could it be worse? Absolutely.

At Erie Ale Works we experienced much of the same. We closed early on Black Friday, stayed shut on Saturday and Sunday, and reopened on Wednesday, Dec. 4. I estimate we lost out on between \$5,000 and \$7,000. In conversations with my peers I heard similar stories of the weekend promotions that were planned and the loss of so much potential to get ahead financially. Weeks of planning and promotion down the tubes. I could almost hear my friends' heads shaking in frustration when we talked over the phone.

So now what? Well, we do what we always do, keep at it. We're resilient, remember?

What can you do? Buy a local coffee. Buy a local beer. Buy a Christmas gift from a local merchant. Buy local gift cards. Toss another buck in the tip jar. It all helps. This community is greater because of its small businesses and each purchase truly can make an impact.

Jeff McCullor is the co-owner of Erie Ale Works. He can be reached at jeff@eriealeworks.com

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Teacher Shortage Signals Turbulent Time for Education

Profession in dire need of paradigm shift

By: Chloe Forbes

“Children ask questions that they’re curious about, that they want to know about. Like, ‘What is the sky?’ and ‘What is the earth?’ and ‘What are trees?’ and ‘What do bees do?’ and things like that,” explained comedian and actor Andy Griffith during a 1961 filming of *I’ve Got a Secret*, a classic game show.

To highlight the importance of educators during a teacher shortage, Griffith asked a panel of guests to explain everyday natural phenomena in a way children could understand. Although the panelists comically failed at explaining matters to the children present, the issue was no laughing matter. Griffith, who was a teacher before going into show business, made that point.

Historically, teacher shortages have signaled things like an older generation retiring or a surge in population. Now, the shortage marks something new — a change in attitude. In the past decade, the number of teacher certifications issued in Pennsylvania has declined by 66 percent, according to data from the state. “That’s how we have measured it to see that over time, there has been a decrease in the number of new teachers coming into the teacher pipeline, and that is falling well short of the demand of our public schools,” said Chris Lilienthal, a spokesperson for the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA). “The underlying problem really is that not enough young people are going into teaching.”

In the Erie School District, there are currently four vacancies according to Natalie Fatica, director of human resources. Compared to other districts of similar size in the state, the circumstances are not dire, which she attributes to strategic partnerships with local universities. The lack of teachers is part of a bigger picture, though. “It used to be in education that people would talk about coming to the Erie School District and talk about how they had to substitute for a while before they could get an actual position, and it’s not like that anymore,” she said. However, she expects the shortage will worsen as the district is left to rely on things like emergency permits.

Currently, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) issues emergency permits to public schools that are unable to fill vacancies. “With your bachelor’s degree in the state of Pennsylvania, you can get an emergency permit and teach, and obviously, they may have a math background, but they don’t have a teaching background, so that makes it more difficult for the individual teaching and for the students,” Fatica said. “Basically, the teacher is learning along with the students in those circumstances.”

PDE data shows 6,323 teachers worked via emergency permits in the 2023-24 school year. For comparison, the number of new teacher certifications in 2022-23 — the latest data available — totaled 6,515. Attrition rates continue to climb to records, too, as 9,587 teachers left the field in 2022-23.

PROVIDED BY GANNON UNIVERSITY



Dr. Kyle LaPaglia, director of Gannon’s School of Education, teaches students during class. Currently, there is a teaching shortage as fewer people are entering the field of education.

Just as there are many factors exacerbating the shortage, the solution must be multifaceted to address the myriad challenges that have culminated.

Addressing pay

No matter where on the list it ranks, pay is an issue that educators say must be addressed to make the field a desirable proposition. Shortages are seen most in special education and STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and math). As the cost of living rises and college continues to grow more expensive, those interested in STEM topics may find it more financially viable to enter the burgeoning and (much higher-paying) fields of artificial intelligence or cyber engineering instead of teaching.

Special education is another subject in need of

teachers, and Fatica said the Erie School District works with Gannon University, which has an accelerated special education certification that teachers earn as they work within a special education classroom. Mercyhurst University has a similar program that enables educators to be full-time leaders in a special education classroom while earning their certification.

In other states like Tennessee, paid residency experiences have become popular. In these programs, school districts offer student teachers financial support in exchange for a commitment to teach in that district upon coursework completion. Mississippi, New Mexico, Florida, and Georgia have invested in teacher pay raises in recent years to entice teaching candidates in those states.

New to Pennsylvania this year is the student teacher stipend program. “Many college students work part-time as they’re putting themselves through college. Those education majors, when they got to student teaching placement, had to give up those part-time jobs to give their placement their full attention, which is the right thing to do, but it created financial hardships for a lot of people,” Lilienthal said, explaining that students teach a full course load as regular teachers would.

PSEA is also in favor of phasing in a new minimum salary of \$60,000 by 2026. “We strongly believe we need to take a strong step like that to remain competitive with our neighboring states so that we can continue to have high-quality professionals in our classrooms,” Lilienthal said. Erie Public Schools has revamped its salary schedule twice recently to ensure its entry-level pay remains competitive as they are losing teachers to county districts. “I think it has helped attract some people, but I don’t think that it’s going to completely solve the issue,” Fatica said.

Lilienthal agreed, but said it’s a good first step to manage turnover. “We have to make sure we are paying teachers competitive salaries so that we can attract the best and brightest to this field and that we can retain them over the long term because retention is also a problem,” he said. The stipend to get students through student teaching not only helps with financial hardship but also helps students be prepared for the adversity they may face within a classroom.

Retaining teachers and recruiting more

A challenge with taking shortcuts to certification is that teachers may enter a classroom without proper preparation like teaching pedagogies, child development, and curriculum development coursework. “What’s concerning about that is that you create a situation where a college graduate or somebody with only

“I think one of the things that’s been very demoralizing for some teachers has been a national sort of movement that has devalued public education and devalued the role of teachers in our students’ lives ... I think we, as a society, really need to put that focus back on what it means to be a teacher.” — Chris Lilienthal, spokesperson for the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA)

a few years of experience is coming into a classroom who may not be fully prepared for what it means to be a teacher,” Lilienthal said.

Both Gannon and Mercyhurst give their students classroom experience within the first year and expose them to various classrooms and students so they can find their best fit. “They’re out there early, and they’re out there often,” said Dr. Phillip Belfiore, chair of Mer-

cyhurst’s education department. Belfiore said that Mercyhurst has made a cognizant effort to teach its students about adversity at a time when some senior teachers in the system feel discouraged or burnt out. “How do I teach my teachers to be resilient in the face of some of those adversities and persist as a quality teacher? How do they find the best teachers to be partners with and not get consumed with the teachers’ lounge where people sit around oftentimes and complain about why things aren’t the way they should be? We recognize that,” he said.

At Gannon, they also work with local districts to ensure their teachers are set up for success. Dr. Kyle LaPaglia, director of Gannon’s School of Education, tells districts, “You have this student coming in, there are expectations, and one of them is to really show them what your job is but also talk positively about that.” LaPaglia said that Gannon provides a realistic picture of education for its students, because as rewarding as the education profession is, it’s not always positive. “We talk about ... [seeing or hearing] things [at the start of a career] that are negative... What can we do to strategize so those students can be successful?” he said.

When a teacher has a negative outlook or is burnt out, it impacts the students, too. PSEA has incorporated webinars during the summer, when school isn’t in session, to address the well-being and professional development of teachers. “It can be a very stressful job, and we cannot, as teachers, be in a position to help students if we are struggling with mental health chal-

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Happy Holidays!

Thank you, Erie County! As we wrap up another incredible year at Erie County Community College, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our amazing local community. Your support and engagement have made this year truly unforgettable!

From all of us at EC3,

We wish you a joyous holiday season filled with warmth, happiness, and cherished moments with loved ones. Here's to a bright and prosperous new year ahead!



lenges ourselves,” Lilienthal commented. Belfiore said that teachers have to be in a good place themselves and feel supported to provide high-quality education. When a student feels cared for and engaged, they look forward to school, and education becomes something they feel empowered by.

“Teachers orchestrate a lot of that,” he said, noting that when a teacher is negative, it not only hurts the student but reflects poorly on the profession, too. “A teacher with a negative attitude in a public classroom certainly turns those students off to the field of education.”

Cultivating interest in the humanities is becoming more common thanks to apprenticeships and dual enrollment programs. Earlier this year, PSEA partnered with Educators Rising, a national network that provides in-school education programming for high schoolers, to launch a state chapter. It currently has 274 students enrolled across 29 participating schools. Students learn about curriculum development and teach mini-lessons, gaining up to nine college credits that count at participating universities and colleges. PSEA is looking to expand the program in the coming

years to encourage wider interest in the teaching profession and attract students who traditionally wouldn’t consider it.

Gannon likewise has a pipeline program targeting students in Erie Public Schools. The Archbishop Gannon Scholars Program provides full tuition for four years to students who meet the academic requirements for Gannon but cannot afford to attend. This is helpful for the teacher shortage, which is documented more in low-income and urban areas than in suburban areas. It’s those students that Gannon focuses on placing back into the public schools so the teachers have a similar background and understanding of their students and know how the school operates.

Public perception problems

The one thing that has changed this time seems to be something without a simple solution — attitude. In creating a rewarding profession, officials must consider the mounting pressure outside the classroom.

Belfiore said the politics of public education have become a challenge, and the PDK Poll of the Public’s Attitudes

Toward the Public Schools this year showed that 60 percent of respondents would not want a child of theirs to take up teaching in public schools. “I know there’s also the politics of public education. What you can and cannot say, what you can read and cannot read, and that plays a part, I think, in how parents view teaching and the teaching profession as it’s displayed on TV and in the media,” Belfiore said.

In the PDK poll, parents cited inadequate pay and benefits, lack of student discipline, the thanklessness of the job, and concerns of school safety as their primary concerns. As there are more stories of book banning and conversations regarding gender within academic settings, the image people have of teachers has become blurred. Historically, a public classroom was four walls with a chalkboard.

Now, the landscape has changed. During the pandemic, a crisis narrative ensued around education. Still, headlines in the media focus on things like how standardized test scores have increased but still have not returned to pre-COVID numbers. It does not take into account the fact that American stu-

dents are performing better than students in other countries, according to data from the Program for International Student Assessment. It does, however, insinuate that teachers are somehow failing the students, and therefore reflect poorly on the public education system, when it’s a fluid atmosphere gauged using rigid testing.

Through all the numbers and political conversations, Lilienthal said it’s the core values of teachers that seem to get lost in the mix. “I think one of the things that’s been very demoralizing for some teachers has been a national sort of movement that has devalued public education and devalued the role of teachers in our students’ lives,” he said. “They come into the school every day just focused on getting that student to a better place. That’s what it’s all about for them. There is no political motive. There is no cultural motive. It is all about helping that student become the best person they can be, and I think we, as a society, really need to put that focus back on what it means to be a teacher.”

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Doomed to Repeat It: Extremism Throughout America's History

Ugly undercurrents of our past amplified in digital echo chambers of our present

By: Jonathan Burdick

It was only a dozen people, but the sight was no less shocking: masked neo-Nazis marching through the streets of Columbus, Ohio last month, proudly displaying their swastika flags and repeatedly shouting racial slurs.

"At the end of day, they want to create fear and anxiety in communities," Oren Segal, vice president of the Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism, told the New York Times. "[A]nd get a photo op." In 2023 alone, his organization identified 282 events organized by white supremacists, a 63 percent increase from 2022.

A 2024 report released by the U.S. Government Accountability Office asserts that "the internet, and in particular social media platforms, is an effective tool for spreading propaganda and manipulation." This is likely the least surprising news ever to anybody who has spent more than a few minutes online. The report continues that much of this extremism originates on "niche platforms" (where such ideas don't violate lax terms of services) as a means to "cultivate U.S.-based hate speech and extremism for a range of radical ideologies."

They concluded that this is a "dangerous indicator of increased white nationalism discourse in public" and that there continues to be a substantial distribution of "hateful images in the form of memes," spread by groups as extreme as the Ku Klux Klan, who are increasingly and stealthily using the internet "to reinforce their teachings ... and employ recruitment techniques framed around an ideology of social supremacy."

Christiana Pazzanese wrote in 2017 for Harvard Law Today how the internet was meant to be a "great equalizer" for society. "Technology would democratize access to information and remove barriers between people who wished to connect and share ideas," she explained. "Yet an unfortunate and largely unintended consequence of the rise of social media is that instead of being better informed and exposed to ever-broadening viewpoints, research shows that Americans today are more polarized and draw from shrinking pools of news."

Those online, she argued, are generating "virtual gated communities." That trend has only surged in recent years as people continue to self-curate their own distinctive echo chambers. Many of these self-curated echo chambers are, in turn, radicalizing people with extremist ideologies. Information outside of one's self-imposed gates is deemed inherently untrustworthy. Lies. Propaganda. Fake news.

What is it then that attracts people to such extremist ideologies? The Cambridge Handbook of Political Psychology notes that feelings of distress lead to increased desires for clarity on issues. The world is confusing. The amount of information needed to even vaguely process and understand it is staggering. People desire simple solutions for complex problems.



George Wallace, then governor of Alabama, is shown here attempting to block the racial integration of the University of Alabama in 1963. Wallace ran for president in 1968 as a third party candidate using the slogan "segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever." He won an astounding 46 electoral votes.

"[This] increases the appeal of the clear-cut answers that politically extreme movements provide for pressing societal problems," the handbook explains. "[P]olitically extreme beliefs are associated with overconfidence in the correctness of one's beliefs and knowledge about the world, an increased susceptibility to beliefs that are not supported by science or reason, and intolerance of competing belief systems or groups perceived as ideologically different."

Such extremism is nothing new, of course. In the 1980s, the Department of Justice released a report describing how extremist groups across the country viewed "their mission as bringing about the revolution and blame[d] all the Nation's problems on a particular group" while "exploit[ing] legitimate political issues to attract members." The report stated that left-wing extremist groups generally emphasized class struggle while right-wing groups championed white supremacy, nationalism, and "extremes of Christianity."

Rewind to any era of American history and one will find examples of extremism: insurrectionary anarchists, revolutionary communists, pseudoscientific eugenicists, nativist xenophobes, Christofascists, White Citizens' Councils, and Ku Klux Klan chapters. Such Klan chapters, for instance, existed all across the United States throughout most of the 20th century. In Pennsylvania, membership in the 1920s was as high as 250,000 at its peak, according to a 1986 study.

Leading up to and even during World War II, Nazism

had a small, but not insignificant presence across the country. While not a card-carrying Nazi, Henry Ford was well-known for his unapologetic antisemitism. In a March 1923 interview with the Chicago Tribune, Adolf Hitler seemed thrilled that Ford was considering a presidential run. "I wish I could send some of my shock troops to Chicago and other big American cities to help in the elections," Hitler said. "We look on Heinrich Ford as the leader of the growing Fascisti movement in America."

The pro-Nazi German American Bund had a dues-paying membership of around 25,000 in the United States. This famously culminated in the 1939 Madison Square Garden rally in New York City attended by 20,000 "true patriots." They called the United States a creation of the Aryan and called for their preservation as people. They detested the "suicidal tolerance" for "parasitical aliens" who they claimed were destroying America's "ethics, morals, patriotism, and religious conceptions."

"The Jew ... is welcome to every one of his characteristics so far as we are concerned, if he could only be moved to remain among his own unassimilable kind and removed from power as a parasite upon the body politic of our and other Aryan Peoples!" the rally's literature declared. "[W]e MUST develop the race-legislation of the United States to the point where those who may rule us, judge us, educate us or in any way direct our minds and souls MAY ONLY BE WHITE MEN!"

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



The pro-Nazi German American Bund had a dues-paying membership of around 25,000 in the U.S. and this march, held in New York City in 1937 shows swastikas flying alongside the stars and stripes.

The Bund made headlines in Erie on numerous occasions. The most significant story was in 1942 when 26 Bundists were indicted by a federal grand jury for their attempts to sabotage the draft by distributing pro-Nazi propaganda. Two were from Erie. Walter Schneller, 25, was described as “among the most active Bundists in Erie” who “arranged many of the Bund meetings during which allegiance to Hitler and his policies were pledged.” Schneller called the allegations “ridiculous” and stated that it was a smear campaign against him by Erie’s “Communitistic Jews.”

The second man, a 29-year-old Greene Township man, confirmed he had twice in Erie met Gerhard Wilhelm Kunze, a prominent Bund leader who himself was being charged with espionage. He denied joining the Bund though. The two Erieites were initially found guilty and sentenced to five years in prison, but in 1945, the Supreme Court overturned their conviction in a 5-4 ruling, deeming that the men had not received a fair trial due to wartime hysteria — although in the dissent, Chief Justice Harlan F. Stone contended that “the Bund leaders had not acted innocently.” Schneller was released, while the Greene Township man was already overseas in the Army, having been granted parole with the condition that he enlist to fight in the war.

Years later in 1959, the American Nazi Party was formed in Arlington, Virginia by George Lincoln Rockwell. The group was always fringe, but made headlines often due to Rockwell’s antics. “[W]e pledge you our lives, Adolf Hitler,” he wrote in 1960, “that we shall not flag or fail until we have utterly destroyed the forces of Marxism and darkness.”

In June 1966, a 19-year-old Venango County resident

attended a meeting for the conservative John Birch Society at an Erie Holiday Inn. He wore black pants and a khaki shirt with a swastika embroidered next to an American flag. Upon his arrival, he began handing out Nazi literature, causing “friction” with other guests. Following a speech, the young self-proclaimed Nazi then made a scene over the speaker calling the American Nazi Party subversive. The speaker responded that he “would not recognize a question from a Nazi,” calling them “nuts” and “screwballs.”

The young man was furious and accused the group of “bigotry in its attitude toward the American Nazi Party.” The speaker threatened to have him thrown out if he caused any more trouble. Afterward, the young man told the reporter that he had only recently joined the American Nazi Party and had been living in Erie, but he’d enlisted in the Army to fight in Vietnam and was reporting to Buffalo for his induction that Sunday. As for Rockwell, he was assassinated the following year, but his American Nazi Party lived on.

As extreme as some of these groups were though, many of their ideas were still relatively popular. In 1968, the presidential election was between the Democratic Party’s Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, the Republican Party’s Richard Nixon of New York, and a third party candidate: the notorious George Wallace, the openly segregationist governor of Alabama and famed foe of the Civil Rights Movement. He was running with the newly-formed populist American Independent Party with a campaign that the Erie Daily Times described as “evil.” After all, this was the governor who during his inauguration speech brazenly declared, “I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever.” He had been a consistent

foe to Martin Luther King Jr., who had only been assassinated months earlier (and, it’s worth noting, that a majority of white Americans shared Wallace’s views of King: a 1966 Gallup poll revealed only 27 percent had a favorable view of him).

Wallace was well-known for these segregationist views when he ran for president — and especially those familiar with Hamermill Paper’s 1965 expansion into Alabama and the company’s executives rubbing elbows with the steadfast segregationist, leading to highly publicized protests at the company’s Erie headquarters.

His presidential campaign stressed “law and order,” pledged to stop the spread of communism, and was committed to individual states, not the federal government, having the right to decide if they would be segregated, condemning such federal overreach as “liberal left-wing dogma which now threatens to every man, woman, and child in the United States.”

Wallace promised to solve complex problems with simple solutions. He’d win the Vietnam War within 90 days or immediately withdraw all U.S. troops. His running mate, Curtis LeMay, even implied using nuclear weapons to win it. He condemned professors, journalists, judges, and preachers for not caring about “the pipe-fitter, the communications workers, the fireman, the policeman, the barber, the white collar worker” or “the average man on the street.”

“Our system is under attack: the property system, the free enterprise system, and local government,” Wallace said in an October 1968 Madison Square Garden speech. “The American people are not going to stand by and see the security of our nation imperiled, and they’re not going to stand by and see this nation destroyed ... We are going to turn back to you, the people of the states, the right to control our domestic institutions.”

Wallace lost, but, quite remarkably, he won 46 electoral votes. As an openly segregationist third par-



George Lincoln Rockwell formed the American Nazi Party in 1959 and pledged his life to Adolf Hitler. He was eventually assassinated in 1967, but his American Nazi Party found a foothold.

ty candidate, he received 9.9 million total votes. In Pennsylvania, Humphrey secured 2.3 million votes, followed by Nixon with 2.1 million — and while Wallace didn't come close to winning the state, he still managed to convince 378,582 Pennsylvanians to vote for him. Even with the loss, by the end of the year, a national Gallup poll had Wallace as the seventh-most admired person in the United States, one spot ahead of the pope.

Wallace's campaign, understandably, illustrated the frustration and disillusionment that many Americans had for the two-party system. It also demonstrated that, despite many of his extreme and defiantly racist views, millions were still willing to vote for him. However, he received plenty of pushback from conservatives who weren't buying what he was selling. This included the Committee for a Reasonable America, who took out full-page advertisements in Pennsylvania newspapers highlighting how Wallace as governor increased Alabama's debts, did little to stop violent crimes, and hurt the state's public education system. An Erie Daily Times op-ed stated that the "hatred and frustration" fueled by Wallace was leading to "the splintering process in America" and should be resisted.

In 1972, a 31-year-old Bernie Sanders, writing about Wallace's supporters, noted that he understood the anger people had over America's political system. He stressed though that such anger could very easily be exploited.

"I came away from these Wallace [voter] interviews ... [thinking] that democracy in America (in any sense of the word) just might not make it," wrote Sanders. "My mind flashed to scenes of Germany in the late 1920s. Confusion, rebellion, frustration, economic instability, a wounded national pride, ineffectual political leadership — and the desire for a strong man who would do something, who would bring order out of the chaos. ... Could it happen here? I see no reason why it couldn't."

In 1996, with the internet now increasingly available, Pennsylvania's Human Relations Commission put out a report on the growth of hate groups throughout the commonwealth. "As recently as seven years ago, I could have counted on the fingers of one hand the number of white supremacist organizations active in Pennsylvania," Richard B. Anliot wrote in the report. The report identified nearly 50, many using the Bible as their rationale. "The beliefs of all these groups include that whites are the only children of God and are superior to all other races, that all non-whites are 'mud people,' that Jews are the children of Satan, and that all immigrants and Jews should go back where they came from."

That same year, the first major neo-Nazi website was established, aggressively promoting white supremacy, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, Holocaust denial, and conspiracy theory after conspiracy theory. It remains a popular internet forum today with millions of posts.

Two decades later in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, a shocking rally brought together many of these extremist groups: neo-Nazis, neo-Confederates, neo-fascists, white nationalists, and Klansmen. "Jews will not replace us," they chanted, tiki torches in hand, along with other Nazi slogans like "blood and soil." The next day, a 20-year-old white supremacist drove his vehicle into a crowd of counter-protesters. Dozens were injured. Heather Heyer, 32, was killed.

In the online world, hate speech, conspiracy theories, and extremist views are spreading more rapidly than ever. Elon Musk's X, formerly known as Twitter, has replatformed formerly banned extremists such as Alex Jones and Andrew Tate. Neo-Nazi content is rampant on the social media platform with many accounts paying for blue checkmarks to have their hate speech amplified.

Extremism is more visible than ever. The Anti-Defamation League notes that many believing such views are "immune to evidence" and often tell others to "do their own research" and collect their own "evidence." While they provide guidelines for how to talk with loved ones who embrace such views, such conversations can be daunting, even seemingly impossible.

The truth may be a difficult pill to swallow. The spread of extremism is a complex problem. There are no simple solutions.

Jonathan Burdick runs the public history project Rust & Dirt. He can be reached at jburdick@eriereader.com

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FEATURE

A Few Amens for St. James A.M.E.

Church has served Erie's Black community for 150 years

By: Liz Allen

At the invitation of my friend and former Morning News colleague Fred Rush, I planned to attend the 10 a.m. Sunday service at St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church on either Nov. 24 or Dec. 1. Thank heavens I opted for the Nov. 24 service, because a literal Act of God — the apocalyptic post-Thanksgiving snowstorm — would have prevented me from getting there on Dec. 1.

At the church service I attended, I learned some things about the impressive 150-year history of St. James African Methodist Episcopal, the oldest Black congregation in Erie; famed composer-arranger Harry T. Burleigh had been a member.

I met the marvelous pastor, the Rev. Madonna Gray. I stepped out of the comfort zone of my Catholic upbringing to get anointed on my forehead by Rev. Gray at the altar call.

I discovered that I knew the words and melodies for most of the hymns, including "Blessed Assurance," one of the first songs I learned when I was cajoled into joining the choir at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana years ago. I protested then that I couldn't sing. Nonsense, Rev. Gray reminded me. If you can speak, you can sing, she said.

Writing this story gave me a chance to reflect on the need for more connections among faith-based com-

munities in Erie, because good things are happening in those circles. In our fractured world, we need regular reminders about that.

For example, the Erie Spiritual Coalition has called attention to the need for a strong tenants' bill of rights, to assure that affordable housing is safe, secure, and up to code.

As a member of the local chapter of Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, I know that our small group is reeling from the results of the 2024 election. We will be tracking upcoming federal legislation that will hurt the poor and marginalized and hope to enlist others to speak with lawmakers.

Rev. Gray, the mother of two grown daughters, has a passion for working with youth. To reach youngsters and put them on a positive path, they need to know the history of the institution and hear the stories of those who have been part of St. James since it was founded in 1874, she said.

That familiarity starts by using the whole name for the congregation — St. James African Methodist Episcopal — instead of the A.M.E. abbreviation, she said.

The commemorative booklet for the church's 150th anniversary, celebrated with a dinner and exhibit on Sept. 14 and 15, traces the church's history and explains its importance to Black church-goers in Erie.

CONTRIBUTED



These portraits of Bishop Richard Allen and his wife Sarah hang in the Founders Room at St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church, which celebrated its 150th anniversary this year.

“From 1874 to 1921, St. James had the only Black church building in Erie,” the booklet reads. “Many of the new churches that have formed since 1915 were nurtured and encouraged by St. James, which frequently offered the use of its facilities as a temporary home for emerging congregations.”

St. James itself emerged from Wesleyan Methodist Church, located at 457 W. Third St. “This group recognized the necessity of a place for spiritual and community welfare in Erie’s Black community. Differences arose regarding the proclaimed faith. This disagreement split the original congregation,” according to the commemorative booklet.

After reorganizing, the new congregation met at East Third and German streets, then at 218 E. Sixth St. In April 1874, the Pittsburgh Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church formally accepted St. James as an affiliate. Another move followed to 242 E. Seventh in 1902 but the building was swept from its foundation by the Millcreek Flood in 1915. The church was rebuilt and served for decades, until ground was broken for the current church at 236 E. 11th St. in 1986. The new church was dedicated on July 26, 1987.

Rev. Gray, who started at St. James in November 2019, is the 70th pastor to serve St. James and is one of only a handful of female pastors of mainline Christian churches in Erie. “We as women still have a long way to go,” she said in an interview. “Part of the issue is we have not been introduced to or studied our own history as women,” she said.

She herself has had an interesting religious journey, one that shaped her outlook on the importance of faith, family, and tight-knit neighborhoods. Her parents, Helen and William Gray, moved to a small town outside of Columbus, Ohio, from Griffin, Georgia. Her father, a U.S. Air Force veteran, was Catholic and when her parents married, her mother converted, as the Catholic Church required back then. Her dad gave her the lovely name of Madonna.

“I came up in a Catholic village,” she said. Her group of 10 close friends in Catholic grade school didn’t distinguish themselves as Black and White. When the friends went to public high school, though, they were ostracized. “We got called all kinds of names but because of our upbringing, we stuck together,” she said.

She was raised to prepare for adulthood by her parents and by a neighborhood woman named Mama Nita, who organized a program for young people who worked in one of the five restaurants — from the cafeteria to the upscale Rose Fountain — at Lazarus, the big department store in Columbus.

The young people did all kinds of jobs — grilled food, washed dishes, waited on customers. But Mama Nita had one rule. “She wouldn’t allow us to take our tips home,” Rev. Gray recalled. Instead, the young employees had to sock their earnings in the store’s credit union.

For the first two years of college, Lazarus also matched tuition payments for its employees and added the students back to the payroll during breaks and summer vacation.

For college, Gray started at Ohio University before transferring to the historically Black Wilberforce University. During a college break, her uncle invit-

CONTRIBUTED



Rev. Madonna Gray delivers the sermon at St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church on Nov. 24.

ed her to attend an A.M.E. church. “I enjoyed it but I still wasn’t convinced,” she said. What eventually persuaded her to join the denomination was its emphasis on ministering to young people, because she had witnessed the positive outcomes in her hometown when the community offered opportunities for youth to land jobs and become leaders.

She worries that we don’t take time anymore to share stories about our own upbringings and favorite memories. For her, that also includes reminiscing about old and young gardening in the neighborhood, sitting on the porch and swapping stories as they snapped green beans.

Before going into ministry full-time, she had a long career as a program officer for the State of Ohio. Working in the church is different, she said. “When people get on your nerves, you can’t give up,” she said. “When the Pharisees and the Sadducees got on Jesus’s nerves, he didn’t give up. He just showed them through his action and his parables what they were lacking.”

In the Methodist Church, bishops assign pastors to one-year stints at a time, but pastorships can be renewed. Her assignment to St. James is her fifth pastorate.

She is assisted by various lay leaders, including the Board of Stewards, the Trustees and two organizations for young people — the Richard Allen Young Adult Council, named for the St. James founder, and the Young People’s Division. Both groups teach leadership and business skills, she said, and the church

history shows many Black leaders in Erie belonged to St. James African Methodist Episcopal, including the late civil rights and labor leaders, Howard and Mildred Horton.

Erie County Councilman Andre Horton, their son, read from the Gospel of Luke on the Sunday I attended, citing each verse by number as he read. That made me pay attention — and the message was reinforced when Rev. Gray re-read from Luke for her sermon.

The history of St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church is ongoing, Rev. Gray said. She keeps thinking of new ways to meet the needs of her congregation — for example, adding Bible study classes on days and times that make it convenient to attend.

And during her time in Erie, she wants to learn more about the earliest church members and their descendants, listed in the commemorative program as “Mrs. Mary J. Blake, Mrs. Emma L. Franklin, Mrs. Richard Johnson, Mrs. Maria Rector, Mr. James Williams and Mr. Wash Williams.”

As I left St. James, I remembered that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that the “most segregated hour of the week” occurs on Sunday mornings in church.

Everyone at St. James made me feel welcome and I’d like to return for another Sunday service when I am not busy scribbling notes. I just have to learn to say a few more “amens.”

Liz Allen can be reached at lizerie@aol.com.

Erie's Year in Review 2024

A local look back to what brought us to where we stand this year

By: Erin Phillips

Wait. Did all of 2024 just happen within the last month?

As I sit down to write this year's Year in Review, I find it difficult to reflect on more than the last quarter of the year, as it is obviously so consequential to our collective well-being. But as an exercise in setting healthy boundaries (which we can all stand to do more of), I'm making a point to look beyond the national firehose of embarrassment (at its best) and global panic (at its worst) to bring you up to speed on anything locally significant you may have missed in the past year — or what may have been overshadowed in recent weeks.

A lot has happened in Erie in 2024 — from local politics to our arts and culture scene, from economic development to environmental progress. Obviously there have been questionable local decisions that we have to reckon with, but there are also plenty of reasons to celebrate. We have a lot of changemakers in Erie and, as our country's decisions are increasingly being made by real-life cartoon villains, we have to rely on local levelheadedness in leadership, our community's resilience, our welcoming spirit and generous inclinations, our creative thinkers, and inspiring helpers to see Erie through to the future and make it a healthy, thriving place worthy of passing down to younger generations.

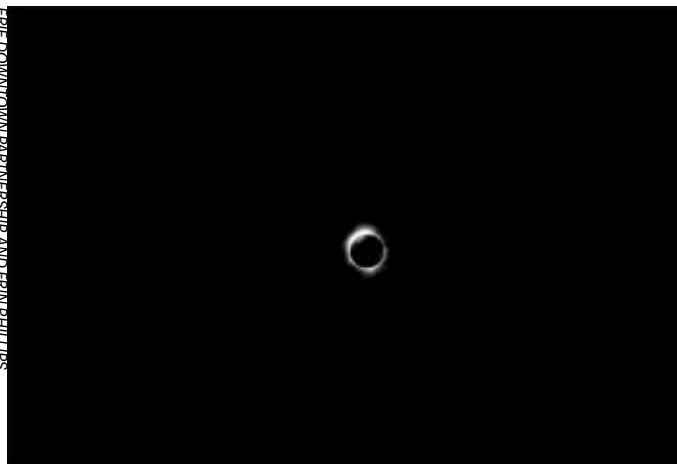
So — let's take stock and review our year, Erie.

Erie's Growth: Downtown and Beyond

It may feel like a million years ago, but remember back in April when the sun and moon aligned and plunged Erie County into darkness for a few brief moments? Erie being situated within the **path of totality** was an opportunity for us all to experience something celestial and otherworldly together — in a moment of silence and awe at the universe. It was really something. And it was actually a pretty big boon to our local economy. According to the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, Erie welcomed approximately 200,000 visitors, injecting upwards of \$50 million into the local economy.

I would venture a guess that a lot of that cash was spent in our burgeoning and beautified downtown. Downtown Erie is where Erie (as we know it) began

ERIE DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIP AND ERIN PHILLIPS



A number of economic strides, small business successes, and infrastructure improvements have happened in Erie in 2024 including (clockwise from top left): the economic boon from being within the path of totality of the total solar eclipse in April, the completion of the expERIENCE Children's Museum's final expansion and renovation project, Celebrate Erie's massive crowds, and the continued restoration efforts on (and off of) Millionaire's Row at the hands of the Historic Erie Preservation Trust.

and its progress is always a litmus test towards progress throughout our county — and downtown has been busy. With local nonprofits like the **Erie Downtown Development Corporation** and the **Erie Downtown Partnership** (not to mention the under-the-radar work of local neighborhood groups like Our West Bayfront, the Bayfront Eastside Taskforce, and the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network) — there are a ton of folks out there working to make Erie cooler, more accessible, and more beautiful, while opening pathways to opportunities and programs of service.

The **expERIENCE Children's Museum** (winner of Best of Erie's Best Museum in 2023) wrapped up construction on phase two of its former home in the historic livery of the Boston Store on French Street in July, thus connecting the new building with the old, and officially cutting the ribbon on their impressive more than 30,000-square-foot facility. New exhibits range from art and creative think-

ing, to recycling, construction, invention, STEM, and more with dozens of hands-on ways for little ones to tinker, learn, and play. It is an incredible resource for Erie's youngest population.

With work underway on the **Bayfront Connector** project, you can literally watch progress happening in real time. One can only hope that the plans eventually decided upon by local government and executed by PennDOT will be in Erie's best future interest — but regardless of the eventual outcome, expect construction for the foreseeable future and make a plan to divert your commute away from the mess for a while.

Perhaps onto 12th Street? The thoroughfare has recently come under closer examination, as the city has drafted a proposal for the **12th Street Reimagined** project — which was written after input sessions with the community and hiring consultants using funding from the aforementioned PA Department of Community and Economic Development. The

plan aims to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety and infrastructure, redevelop and mark historical sites, "greenify" the streets with boulevards, planters, and new trees, offer facade improvement incentives for property owners, and install public art — to name a few.

Part of designating sites as historic would fall under the purview of Erie's growing **Historic Preservation Program** which, this year, has installed a new planner (Heather Olson), published a Historic Preservation Plan, and has been working to establish protocols for historic building landmark designation within the City of Erie. So far, locally designated structures include PACA's Meyer Building, the Federal Courthouse complex, Erie Day School, a private residence in the Frontier neighborhood, and, most recently, the Erie Art Museum's Customs House. The program has also recently launched a citywide historic resource survey which will document structures, including those which have *historically*



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been left out of those types of surveys — namely, *culturally* significant properties (not just architecturally significant), those in underserved and neglected neighborhoods, and those properties that have “come of age” since the last survey — buildings need to be 50+ years old to be considered historic (although this writer takes umbrage with such a rapidly approaching definition of her own historic significance).

In the same breath, one must acknowledge the continued overall vibe-changing progress happening in the **West Sixth Street Historic District** at the hands of the Historic Erie Preservation Trust, benefactor Tom Hagen, and architect Jeff Kidder (along with scads of local construction companies). Current projects in progress include the former Sophia’s Tavern on West Sixth and Cherry, which is slated to be occupied by local queen-of-flaky-layers Jessica Schultz (40 Under 40 Class of 2023) and her bakery Herb and Honey in the coming year. Additionally, neighbors and visitors can watch the work happening on the Thayer Thompson House at West Eighth and Cherry, the Olds Norman House at West Seventh and Sassafras (which is report-

edly being shorn up for eventual structural movement to West Sixth Street), and the Carter Shannon House on West Sixth and Sassafras (among others) as these projects move towards completion to join the meticulously restored and renovated homes on Millionaire’s Row.

With all of the progress happening downtown, it’s always nice to have a reason to celebrate it — and the City of Erie (along with its many local partnerships) delivers with **Celebrate Erie**. This year’s event was one to remember, with the 30-year reunion of Erie’s own One World Tribe on opening night, followed by national touring acts Jimmy Eat World, Wheatus, and Gabby Barrett all playing to the gorgeous backdrop of the sun setting over the bay and Bicentennial Tower to the north, and all of the shiny, newly-restored historic buildings along State Street. Erie was looking pretty darn pretty, and it was an honor to celebrate all of it together for that weekend in August.

Erie’s Political Landscape

Let’s start with a bright spot, shall we? Erie City Councilwoman **Jasmine Flores** (40 Under 40 Class of 2023) became the



Erie’s decision-makers have a huge impact on our local community’s smooth functioning. There have been ups and downs this year, politically (clockwise from top left): Erie City Councilwoman Jasmine Flores became the youngest and the first Latina to preside over city council, the Millcreek Township general authority voted to demolish a former schoolhouse at the entry to Presque Isle, Daria Devlin adds herself to the Democratic primary ticket to run against Joe Schember in the upcoming mayoral election, and County Executive Brenton Davis had custom fake police badges made for himself and his staff, using taxpayer dollars.

youngest and the first Latina to preside over city council. This was a long overdue historic moment for the city.

Her seat was barely warm, however,

when her job of overseeing the interviews of applicants for an open spot on council (rather than it just being filled with an elected councilperson — a result

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of **Councilman Ed Brzezinski** running for two seats when he is, in fact, just one person) was thwarted. A mere 24 hours after his retirement (they had a cake and everything), **Mel Witherspoon** (who had reached his term limit) was appointed to the open seat and the 13 public applicants were not interviewed, as was the initial plan. To begin the year with such a shady political move was a shame, and really, an affront to the people of Erie who should (as we are still technically living in a democracy) be able to fairly choose their own representatives.

Speaking of representatives, let's spend a moment on **County Executive Brenton Davis**. You should be able to identify him more clearly this year, given that he spent taxpayer money on having custom fake police badges made for himself and his administration (Davis' is emblazoned with the number 007 — I wish I was kidding).

This year's dumpster fire of county government has been curtailed ever so slightly, with *actual* Democrats taking the majority of the seats on Erie County Council — Davis' "yes men" have been replaced by "hold-on-a-minute" men and we've restored some amount of balance to county government. This holds less water, however, when it comes to the budget — which was approved by council (4-3) at the end of November. Following this approved budget, a number of items were then vetoed by the county executive — some of which stood, some of which were overturned, and some of which were discarded, as they could not legally be vetoed. This budget also includes another tax hike — which wasn't in Davis's initial proposed budget. However the budget set forth by Davis had some very bad math, as was swiftly pointed out by council and independent accountants.

Any veto by Davis requires five votes from council to overturn. This policy came into play well before the budget was on the table when, back in March, county council voted to rescind Davis' controversial lease of a portion of the Blasco Memorial Library to Gannon University to house their water research facility — but this vote was immediately vetoed by Davis and the necessary votes to override it simply weren't there.

State Senator Dan Laughlin won reelection to his position as state senator in a race against local educator, former Democratic party chair, and former contributing editor to this publication **Jim Wertz**. Laughlin won reelection despite that contested column Wertz wrote

GLASS GROWERS GALLERY, ERIE DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIP, AND ERIN PHILLIPS



Erie's arts, culture, and athletics scenes have had much to celebrate in 2024 including (clockwise from top left): the 50th anniversary of Glass Growers Gallery, the triumphant return of the Blues and Jazz Festival, the Erie SeaWolves winning a repeat Eastern League Championship, and a record-breaking Erie Gives Day.

about him way back in July of 2022, which, Laughlin claimed, would hinder his ability to be re-elected (which it very clearly did not). And yet, Laughlin's lawsuit against Wertz and this publication soldiers on at great cost of time, money, and energy to everyone involved.

Mayor Joe Schember will have some opposition when he runs for (what would be) his final term as mayor in the upcoming year. Democrat **Daria Devlin** announced her campaign recently as she feels that she will "provide the change that Erie is hungry for." The school board director, nonprofit leader, and graduate of Erie's public schools is facing an uphill climb against the incumbent and we'll look forward to seeing what transpires as the year progresses.

Outside the city, **Millcreek Township** has been busy demolishing a large swath of buildings near the entrance to Presque Isle in anticipation of attracting developers to the area. The former Sandbar, Manor Motel, and Joe Roots restaurant have already been heaped onto the landfill and, upcoming, remaining portions of the Bel Aire hotel and, much to the chagrin of local advocates, the former Grasshopper building. The latter

was originally built as a schoolhouse that has since been deemed "not historically significant" by a hired historic preservation expert out of Pittsburgh who used the strict protocols of the National Register of Historic Places criteria in her assessment. In November, the Millcreek General Authority voted to demolish this building, one of the few structures harkening to Millcreek's history remaining in the township.

Recently, City Council chambers have been crowded with citizens voicing their concerns to local government. Last year, the contentious issue that brought out the citizenry were the proposed bike lanes for Greengarden Boulevard — that issue has since been resolved and the hot-button bike lanes were installed this year, as the **Active Erie plan** rolls forward.

This year, council heard comments from the community about a couple of issues dear to our community's heart — one being Erie's lack of open container policy, which came inches away from being revoked, but was tabled and essentially forfeited thanks to the advocacy of some local brewers and those speaking on behalf of Erie's already-targeted un-

housed community.

The other jam-packed meeting happened on the same night as advocates of the **Erie Spiritual Coalition's Tenant Bill of Rights** queued up to speak. The focus was unfortunately distracted from this pressing housing-rights issue by a contingent of MAGA supporters (donning red hats — not white hoods, as one citizen's shirt disturbingly pointed out) expressed their outrage at Councilwoman Flores for speaking negatively on social media about Trump and his supporters ahead of the election.

Regardless of this recent behavior of a small contingent of Erie — our city continues to be a welcoming place for all who would like to pursue their happiness in America. Our population continues to be bolstered by **New Americans**, while, at the same time, we stand as a place of refuge for those escaping unthinkable conditions in their homelands. According to USCRI-Erie, refugees resettled in Erie come primarily from Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Iraq, Russia, Somalia, Syria, and Ukraine. These folks help hold our declining population steady, help bolster our economy by collectively purchasing and repairing

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housing (often in neighborhoods where occupancy and housing conditions are in decline), starting local small businesses, paying taxes, and generally making the fabric of our city more diverse, interesting, delicious, and beautiful. While the future of refugees and immigration is uncertain under the incoming administration — 2024 should be celebrated as a year of progress and hope in this sector, locally.

Erie's Art, Culture, and Athletics

Enough about politics. Seriously — boundaries. You can never have too many.

Erie is as beautiful as it is largely because of our robust, diverse, and super creative art scene. While places like **FEED Media Art Center**, **Grounded Print and Paper Studio**, **City Gallery**, **1020 Collective** and their satellite **1020 at the Bastion**, **Glass Growers Gallery**, the **Erie Center for Arts & Technology (ECAT)**, the **Studio at St. Mary's**, and the stalwart **Erie Art Museum**, along with handfuls of other galleries and spaces making up the visual art landscape of Erie — there always seems to be a new spot to mention. This year, **Erie African Arts** (13 E. 13th St.) joined the scene with authentic art sourced from artists across the diaspora including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, and Uganda, among others.

In performing arts news, the folks at **All an Act Theatre** continue their efforts to recover from a devastating fire that tore through their space within the **Community Shelter Services** building back in April. They have been diligently fundraising and restoring the space bit by bit (the historic ceiling in the theater space has now been completely repaired and restored). The troupe has been relying on the space at the **Station Dinner Theater** to occasionally host their shows in the

meantime — look forward to an upcoming Agatha Christie production there soon and check out their website (allanact.net) to donate to their restoration efforts. Community theater truly takes the whole community!

In last year's Year in Review, I noted a change in leadership in the arts community when the then executive director of **Erie Arts and Culture** Patrick Fisher resigned and a new leader was found in Anne O'Dell. Well, this year we've got another change in leadership — O'Dell has moved on from the organization and **Casey Corritore** (40 Under 40 Class of 2023) has been named interim director. We'll keep you posted on any further shifts. Erie Arts and Culture has also moved offices and is now located in the light-filled, gorgeously historic Cashier's House on State Street.

We had some great milestones to celebrate in the art world this year — **Glass Growers Gallery** celebrated their 50th anniversary. For a small business to achieve the staying power of half a century is pretty impressive and speaks to the curatorial savvy and outstanding customer service of the mainstay downtown art hub. Kudos! Also! **Erie's Blues and Jazz Fest** came back, baby! We all dearly missed the yearly takeover of Frontier Park in 2023 and all of the organizers, volunteers, musicians, vendors, and attendees were more than happy to pull out all the stops for the festival's triumphant return this year.

And while we're on the subject of making Erie more beautiful — what's more beautiful than our generosity? 2024's **Erie Gives Day** was a resounding success and the improvements the **Erie Community Foundation** made to the process paid off — benefiting more than 500 nonprofits, 34,763 individual gifts were made totaling \$9,709,602. Um, wow. It feels entirely possible that



Erie's educational scene grows, morphs, changes, and improves with Erie's overall growth each year (clockwise from top left): Erie High School became a United Way Community School, the Jefferson Educational Society's Global Summit packed the Bayfront Convention Center with folks listening to a talk given by Liz Cheney, the Erie County Community College celebrated their second graduating class, and ECAT expanded their offerings to include construction trade opportunities.

next year we could reach the \$10 million mark. Way to go, Erie — this is an absolutely game-changing amount of money for those doing the work to make our community a better, safer, more beautiful place.

Outside of art — Erie's culture also includes local sports and we found ourselves, once again, howling for those **SeaWolves!** In taking the first two of the best-of-three Eastern League Championship Series, the Howlers claimed their second consecutive EL title with a 3-2 win over the Somerset Patriots in Bridgewater, New Jersey. Congratulations to those Erie boys of summer! Keep up the great work!

In college sports it is worth noting that **Mercyhurst University** seized the day and attained Division One status in 2024, joining the NCAA's Northeast Conference. Welcome to the big leagues, Lakers!

Learning and Earning: Erie's Educational Options

Erie's got brains!

Outside of our traditional higher education facilities like the aforementioned Mercyhurst University, Penn State Behrend, Gannon University, PennWest Edinboro, and LECOM, our hard-fought-for **Erie County Community College (EC3)** is continuing to bolster our educational landscape. EC3 honored their second graduating class this spring and celebrated the moment by hosting First Lady Jill Biden as their commencement speaker.

Speaking of women in politics, **Liz Cheney** spoke to an absolutely packed house at the Bayfront Convention Center, kicking off the Jefferson Educational Society's 16th Global Summit. Her discussion was literally record-breaking: it was the single largest paid educational

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program in Erie history. Additional highlights of the local think tank's summit this year included talks led by Chris Matthews, Heather Cox Richardson, and Stephen A. Smith, among many others.

In yet another form of non-traditional educational opportunities in Erie, the **Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT)** has launched their construction trades program, which is a tuition-free program that allows those enrolled to train as carpenter's apprentices in well-equipped facilities, giving them all of the skills and certifications necessary to enter the workforce and help to (literally) build a better Erie. This trade offering joins their other training opportunities that include a variety of healthcare sector educational programs.

The United Way has gained historic ground in their Community Schools program when it announced that **Erie High**, our city's public high school, would be named as such (one of the only Community High Schools in the country). The United Way has worked to install four Community School directors and to inject investments from community business partners into the school — increasing access to resources, helping to create pathways to greater attendance

and academic success, and ultimately, to brighter futures for Erie's youth.

Local Reactions and Pro-actions to Climate Change

Have you guys experienced any weird weather lately? Oh, like, you know, a metric shit-ton of snowfall within the span of a few hours? And yes, here in Erie, we're used to it to some degree, but this Black Friday snowfall was *actually* record-breaking — taking out the previous single-day snowfall record from the Christmas Day dump of 2017. Climate change obviously isn't just about warmth — it's about freakish, unprecedented, extreme weather events (like an inland mountain town in North Carolina getting obliterated by a hurricane or what is pretty much the new normal of constant wildfires across North America).

Last year, this local environmental action section caught the attention of **Jenny Tompkins**, who contacted me about collaborating and sharing data. She has subsequently written an op-ed for the Reader and appeared in our 2024's 40 Under 40 class. Tompkins is the Clean Water Campaign Manager for PennFuture, a state-wide organization that is

working to "lead the transition to a clean energy economy in Pennsylvania and beyond." This year, I went straight to the source and asked Jenny to send along a few of the strides our local community has experienced, environmentally. And she *came through*.

When it comes to **clean water and conservation**, an area of particular importance to our lakeside community, Erie has gotten to work.

- Erie Water Works invested over \$40 million to remove lead from the water supply.
- Regardless of where you stand on the location decision, Gannon's Project NePTWNE appointed a lead in Dr. Sherri Mason and plans for the eventual water research and education center have been made public.
- The National Marine Sanctuary designation for the Lake Erie Quadrangle is moving in a positive direction and being locally spearheaded by Honey Stempka (40 Under 40 Class of 2015), who was key in the initial application process and knows the project front and back.
- LEAF's ReLeaf tree planting initiative installed a tiny forest in clandestine

green space within Franklin Park on Erie's east side — this is a clever and innovative way to use nature's own built-in drive to compete for sunlight to speed up the tree growing process.

Erie's getting there as we work towards producing more **clean energy**, utilizing green technology, moving away from fossil fuels, and working towards reigning in our own contributions to climate change.

- Solar United Neighbors launched a local Erie County Solar Co-op which connects people in Erie with resources and gives them a helping hand when installing solar power either in their homes or businesses. The program basically makes the whole process of converting to solar energy way less overwhelming, expensive, and daunting.
- According to the Green Building Alliance and their Erie 2030 District Progress Report, Erie has experienced a 17.5 percent energy demand reduction and has saved over \$4 million in energy costs.
- A \$3 million state grant was awarded to the City of Erie for the purchase of electric refuse and recycling trucks. An additional \$4 million was granted to Erie's Public Schools for the implementation of 12 electric school buses.

While PennFuture continues to lead the way in terms of local environmental advocacy, there have been a number of **environmental justice groups** working to bring Erie up to speed, environmentally.

- Groundwork Erie, a local branch of a larger environmental justice organization, named a new executive director in Erin Carey, as they continue their work in local neighborhoods by supporting urban farming, involving Erie's youth in sustainable agricultural practices, creating native greenspace, and more.
- The former Erie Coke site was acquired by the Port Authority and the EPA has begun testing the soil for potential off-site contamination
- The Minority Community Investment Coalition's Grow Erie project received a \$50,000 grant from the PA Department of Agriculture. Grow Erie is an aquaponics farm built on the formerly under-utilized Savocchio Park on Erie's east side.

STAN ZLOTOWSKI, PATRICK GRAB 8/14 PHOTO, JESSICA HUNTER



What has Erie accomplished in the past year in terms of combating climate change? Local environmental advocate Jenny Tompkins (bottom left) weighs in (clockwise from top left): LEAF's ReLeaf program planted a "tiny forest" in a park on Erie's east side, we beat our single-day snowfall record in a society-halting snowstorm on Black Friday, and the National Marine Sanctuary designation of the Lake Erie Quadrangle is gaining ground.



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Rimaz focuses her practice on labor & employment law for private and public entities, including nonprofits. She counsels clients on various workplace issues and laws, and also represents employers throughout the administrative process and employment litigation.

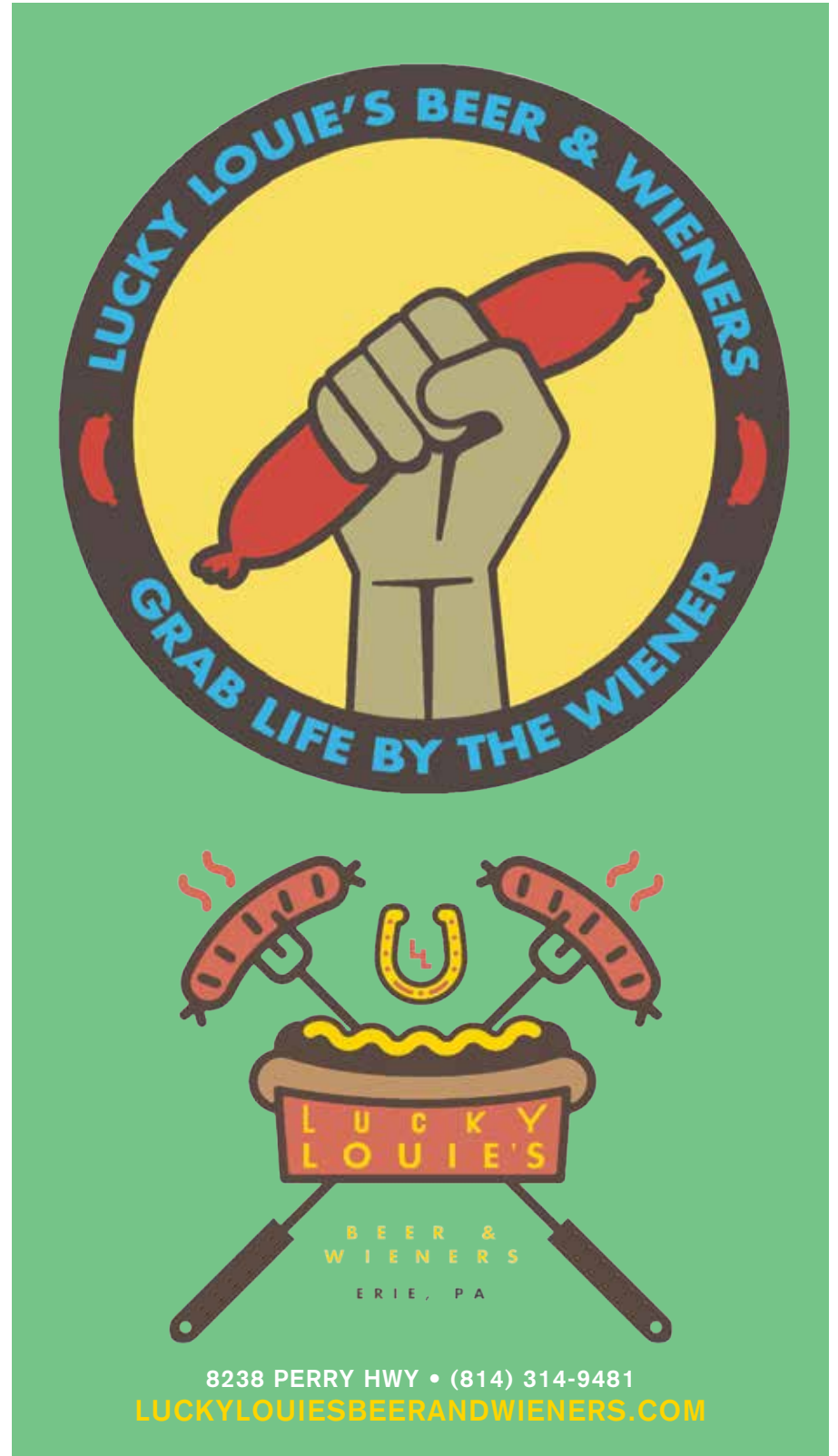
Rimaz earned her J.D. from the Mississippi College School of Law, where she was President of the Women's Student Bar Association, served as a Dean's Ambassador, and was active with the Black Law Student Association. She earned her B.A. from Pennsylvania State University and was a Bunton Waller Merit Scholar. She is a native Arabic speaker and is conversationally fluent in Spanish.

Rimaz 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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The Erie Reader continues to provide our readers with monthly print editions – 12 to be exact – but we’ve also expanded on our offerings by launching a membership program, a book club, and plenty of new content that you’ve come to rely on every year.

- Mercyhurst University recently implemented a new major: Sustainability Studies. Development of this program will obviously benefit students who choose to go into fields like green technology, sustainable agriculture, or climate science, but it will also have an impact locally as projects, studies, and community action will likely result.

A huge thank you to Jenny Tompkins for taking the time to bring us all up to speed and give us all a bit to feel proud of — Erie is working, in all different sectors and throughout governments, busi-

nesses, and educational institutions to make Erie a more sustainable place. While there is still a ton of work to do (and a lot of that work will be forced upon us) — and while nationally, we are very likely about to take a number of steps backwards — we can and should be proud of the work we’re collectively doing to shore up Pennsylvania’s Future.

The Erie Reader’s Year in Review

Here at the Reader, we’re continuing to do all of the things we’ve always done since 2010 and always adding on to those accomplishments. Everyone looks forward to **Erie’s 40 Under 40** and 2024’s

class was a stellar one — so many young, inspiring people who are making Erie better bit by bit. It’s a pleasure to sort through all those nominations every year and get to know, photograph, and celebrate all of the 40 we eventually choose. This year, we held our **40 Under 40 Experience** at FEED Media Art Center and it was quite possibly the best one ever. Thank you to owner Benton Bainbridge and acolyte Alex Staley for all their help and support in pulling off the party of the year!

Voting just closed on **Best of Erie 2024** and we’re so excited to share those results with you next month. Thank you for taking the time to vote for your favorite people, places, and things in Erie. We definitely have some surprises and upsets to share this year — stay tuned!

Just last month we announced our brand new **membership program** — this has been about a year in the making and we’re eager to give our readers another way to support the Erie Reader (which, if you somehow didn’t already know, is the *only* local voice for news, arts, and culture in Erie). For \$15 a month, our members will receive a print copy of the Reader mailed to them (this is something that out-of-towners have requested for years), get an exclusive “Members Only” newsletter curated by yours truly, be entered into exclusive drawings for events tickets, receive discounts to Erie Reader events, and get a PDF of the issue emailed *two days* prior to print publication. It’s a win/win — we get some very necessary financial support to keep on keeping on and you get a bunch of fun extras! Click the **SUBSCRIBE** button on our homepage to learn more.

In 2024, we welcomed local home-cooking and food history enthusiast Morgan Yezzi into the Reader fold and he’s been providing an in-depth breakdown of a re-

worked recipe from the historic 1881 *Erie Cook Book* by Laura Sterrett every month in his **Erie Cook Book Revisited** column. It’s a fun way to connect with local history while making a delicious dish for your family. Look forward to more niche sub-culture columns coming in 2025 — did someone say birding? Just you wait!

In 2024, myself and everyone’s favorite book reviewer Ally Kutz began the official **Erie Reader Book Club** in partnership with our friends at Werner Books and Coffee. Since April we’ve been reading and discussing books that correspond with the monthly themes of our issues. For this Year in Review issue we’re reading *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion, if you’d like to join us (Saturday, Dec. 29 at 1 p.m.). We’ve got a great, friendly, interesting group (with no fewer than three guaranteed Vickys every month, IYKYK) with some members that come every month and some that join in here and there. It’s non-committal, it’s thought-provoking, it’s community building — come see for yourself.

At the end of it all (as I find myself now), we’d just really like to say **thank you** to our readers. We couldn’t be us without you. Thank you for your continued support, your enthusiasm, and your time. Thank you for finding a place for us on your coffee tables and waiting rooms. Thank you for having our backs in the comments sections. Thank you for sharing our stories and for being a part of this small, independent, print media experiment. Happy holidays and happy new year. We look forward to working through 2025, right by your side.

Erin Phillips is honored to serve in her role as Managing Editor and to have the privilege of compiling this, her second-ever Year in Review. It is a creative challenge that has no match. She can be reached at erin@eriereader.com

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EVENTS

A Tale As Old As Time

Experience the magic of *Beauty and the Beast* at the Erie Playhouse

CONTINUING DEC. 13

Beneath the briars, brambles, and bits of stone lies a forgotten palace falling on hard times. There, a fearsome beast stalks the halls, showing ruthlessness to all as rose petals fall, slowly sealing his fate. But just when it appears all hope is lost, there is a knocking at his door, and a guest beyond it that will change his life forever.

After two decades away, the classic rags-to-riches, Academy award-winning musical *Beauty and the Beast* returns to the Erie Playhouse Mainstage for its final show of 2024.

Director Richard Davis is especially excited to see it back, as he was fortunate enough to have played the beloved candlestick Lumiere and choreographed it in the past: "It's a big show and a very hard show. I said I'd never do it again, but never say never. It provides a lot of amazing opportunities for the actors."

Embracing these opportunities are lead performers Audrey Schlosser (in her Playhouse premiere as Belle) and Gabriel Gallagher (as the Beast).

"It's such a fun and heartwarming show," Davis remarked. "And has a great mixture of new people and returning actors. The cast has been excellent."

When the Erie Playhouse originally put on the show, they were one of the first community theaters to be able to do so. Since then, Davis has enjoyed the "rediscovery and rethinking," and the challenge of creating the magical aspects we all know and love.

As the Playhouse concludes another successful season of entertainment, they have added an additional two shows after Christmas to accommodate those still wishing to see the performance.

Some scenes contain violence and may not be suitable for younger audiences. — Cassandra Gripp

CONTRIBUTED



Two decades have passed since the Erie Playhouse presented *Beauty and the Beast*, but this December, the classic rags-to-riches, Academy award-winning musical returns to the Erie Playhouse Mainstage for the theater's final show of 2024.

Fridays and Saturdays, Dec. 13 through Dec. 29 at 7:30 p.m. // Thursday, Dec. 19 at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays, Dec. 15, Dec. 22 and Dec. 29 at 2 p.m. // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10 St. // \$19-30 // For tickets and info: erieplayhouse.org

A performance date was added on Friday, Dec. 27 to make up for a canceled show on Dec. 6

Erie's Favorite Christmas Party Returns to Lavery Brewing Company

Local rockers raise money for Erie's enduring success

SATURDAY, DEC. 14

Deck the Halls with boughs of giving. For a fourth year, "Erie's Favorite Christmas Party" will bring cheer to a local nonprofit with the help of area musicians (led by Erie's Half Glass) and the Lavery Brewing Company.

In the past, the Bunker concert event has raised money for Erie DAWN and Big Brothers & Sisters — this year The Emerging Erie Fund (EEF) will be on the nice list. EEF "is a group of young people working to empower emerging leaders to create a lasting impact in their community through collective giving."

The Emerging Erie Fund is a field of interest fund housed at the Erie Community Foundation overseen by an advisory board that awards annual grants to support Erie's people and places.

Anthony James Amatangelo, of the bands Fox Grotto and Half Glass, is a member of EEF. "I want to try and grow the show each year and I see this as a step in that direction," Amatangelo notes. "The show's usually modest donation can now be a part of a much larger one that makes a discernible impact every year."

Amatangelo continues, "In the theme of growth, EEF has a built-in network of members and other donors that may

not be in tune with the local music scene. So we can reach an entirely new audience and increase participation, hopefully resulting in an increase in donations."

In keeping with the holiday spirit, all the bands are donating their time and talent. Along with Half Glass and Fox Grotto, you'll hear the pop-punk stylings of LADDERS, and hoping to stay off the naughty list is Vices, who will also be using this event to release their debut record.

Everyone knows that the holiday season is a time of giving, but it's particularly important to Amatangelo: "For a lot of people, for any number of reasons, this is not an easy time of year. And as my parents have always taught my sisters and me — we have a very good, fortunate life and it's our responsibility to share that with people. So this is not only a show to raise money for charity, but an event for people to gather, spread some cheer, create some memories and hopefully add a little light to their holiday season."

So, saddle up the reindeer and pull on those stockings, then head to the Bunker in your most festive yuletide attire, and spread some joy this Christmas season. — Larry Wheaton

CONTRIBUTED



Head to Lavery's Bunker this holiday season to enjoy an evening of local rock and roll while supporting a good cause — join Half Glass (pictured), Fox Grotto, LADDERS, and Vices as they raise money for the Emerging Erie Fund.

Doors at 5:30 p.m., Music begins at 7 p.m. // Lavery Brewing Co. Bunker, 128 W. 12th St. Rear // \$5 at Door // 18+ (unless accompanied by an adult) // For info: facebook.com/half-glassrockmusic

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Erie Zoo Extends Hours for Winter Wonderland

Relive the nostalgia of the zoo in wintertime

BEGINNING SATURDAY, DEC. 14

The Erie Zoo will open on select weekends in December, January, and February, keeping visitors entertained and warm through winter. With exhibits featuring over 400 animals and 11 gardens, the Zoo ends its centennial year by celebrating its legacy of providing accessible and educational experiences to the Erie community.

“Our 100th anniversary is an exciting opportunity to reflect on the past and look to the future,” Erie Zoo CEO Roo Kojancie described. “Being able to enjoy the zoo in the winter months is a new experience for many people in our community and a nostalgic memory to our lifelong zoo supporters. Staff and animals look forward to welcoming guests during these new winter hours.”

To commence the new hours, the Erie Zoo will host a Winter Wonderland, which is included in the price of admission and free to all Erie Zoo members. This event features programming for

families, including live entertainment, crafts, holiday shopping at the Animal Art Show, and photo opportunities with the “Mean Green One.” The Wild Winter Snowflake Contest features decorations made by community members displayed across the zoo. The top three entries will receive recognition and prizes.

In partnership with award-winning artist Tara Stonestreet of Taradoodles Toybox, the Erie Zoo will collect donations during Winter Wonderland to give local toys to families in need. The toy donation list features recommendations for children of all ages, with donations collected by the admissions gate. Guests can receive free face paintings or glitter tattoos with each donation. — Thomas Taylor

Dec. 14 and 15, Jan. 18 and 19, and Feb. 15 and 16 // 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. // Erie Zoo, 423 W. 38th St. // \$8-12 (normal cost of admission) or free to members // For info: eriezoo.org



Gen Xers and Millennials in Erie likely remember with fondness the yearly glow of ZooLumination – this winter, the Erie Zoo is harkening back to those times as they open up the zoo on select weekends with winter activities to enjoy throughout the chilly season.

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EVENTS

What Is Crafted Trivia?

Beloved hometown trivia champ brings his custom trivia nights to Erie Art Museum

CONTINUING WEDNESDAY, DEC. 18

You probably know Adam Holquist. The environmental engineer and multi-hyphenate creative is a fixture in Erie's music and art scene. You may also know that Holquist was a three-time *Jeopardy!* champion in 2013 when it was still hosted by the late Alex Trebek. Holquist has hosted a series of successful trivia events, most recently at Altered State Distillery. Now he's brought his Crafted Trivia nights to Erie Art Museum for a limited run.

"I've been a fan of trivia for as long as I can remember. As a kid, I loved *Jeopardy!* and was the kind of kid who looked through reference books for fun," recalls Holquist. He adds, "I think most corporate trivia isn't very good. So, I wanted to write the kind of game that I would want to play." The self-proclaimed "trivia snob" created his Crafted Trivia about two years ago with the main game on the third Thursday of each month at Altered State Distillery. Along the way he's done corporate events, fundraisers, and private parties too. Holquist says, "The Art Museum approached me a few months ago, and I thought it would be fun to do

a more art-focused twist on my usual format."

Holquist writes all of the questions. "My wife Wren helps a lot, particularly with category ideas and concepts," he says. Teams of one to six people compete in a custom-curated trivia game tailored to the venue and audience that venue attracts. "The game at the museum is definitely more art-forward than my usual game ... for example the first game had a round on movies about art and artists. And my games *always* have a music round, because I'm me," he quips.

While the first of the Crafted Trivia Nights at Erie Art Museum was last month, you still have two more opportunities to join in on the fun this season. When asked about the potential for a spring or summer series at the museum Holquist replied, "We're not sure yet — if it becomes a big hit I think we're all open to extending it."

It should be noted that this trivia game isn't only for fun — there are prizes! First place receives an exclusive private tour of the museum with a guided art-making session, plus a local wine and cheese spread. The winning team will also return



Join that *Jeopardy!* guy Adam Holquist (40 Under 40 Class of 2014) as he leads a fun, competitive, art-themed group trivia series at the Erie Art Museum for their newly created Crafted Trivia nights.

for the next trivia night free of charge to defend their title. Second place earns six free admission passes to the museum, while third place receives two. Bonus: every team takes home a commemorative medal!

Crafted Trivia nights include a cash/card refreshments bar. Those who aren't ready to throw their hats into the trivia ring but want to check out the vibe or explore the museum may do so subject to regular museum admission fees. — Edwina Capozziello

Wednesdays, Dec. 18 and Jan. 15 // 7 to 9 p.m. // \$30 per team // To register, visit: erieartmuseum.org

You'll Ha-Ha and Boo-Hoo during *Who's Holiday* at PACA

Three-day, one-woman show revisits holiday classic

BEGINNING THURSDAY, DEC. 19

It's not often we get to revisit beloved characters after their stories have been told — when they're done, they're done. But this holiday season you can see how little Cindy Lou Who, from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, turned out — and the answer is not great!

Join PACA for their presentation of *Who's Holiday*, a one-woman show directed by KC McCloskey and starring Erie stage veteran Adele Crotty as an all-grown-up — like, *very* grown up — Cindy Lou Who.

"This is essentially the story of what has happened to Cindy since that fateful Christmas with the Grinch back when she was just a little kid," Crotty, who also did some editing to the script (by Matthew Lombardo) and contributed to the blocking, design, and props, said. "She's had an incredibly tough and complicated life and is excited for a Christmas party with friends who just don't seem to be coming."

Crotty added, "She is incredibly frank,

which includes drinking, swearing, and discussing sex, murder, and even jail



Join Erie's favorite performing artist Adele Crotty, as she takes the stage solo in PACA's upcoming production of *Who's Holiday* — a spin on the classic *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, telling the story of a grown-up Cindy Lou Who.

— all while scantily clad in lingerie." It should go without saying that *Who's Holiday* is a comedy for mature audiences only, but while it can get quite raunchy, it's also surprisingly emotional at times — and bear in mind, Crotty is all alone on that stage for the entire show.

"It's enormously intimidating to be the only person on stage!" she said. "It's a 30-plus page script with a ton of physical action and emotional exposition."

Maybe you can sympathize with this adult Cindy Lou Who, who has been put through the ringer and, while she retains her sense of humor, is starting to feel abandoned during the season meant for gathering among family and friends.

Said Crotty, "It's a show, and a character, that I think a lot of people can relate to, and now is as good a time as any for people to have some empathy and compassion." — Cara Suppa

Thursday through Saturday, Dec. 19 to Dec. 21 // 7:30 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$20 // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com

Rook Rocks Packed Holiday Calendar

Minka, Sophistafunk, Funktional Flow, Shea D'Heaux, and more close out 2024

BEGINNING FRIDAY, DEC. 20

Are you looking for a few fun nights out during your winter holiday? If you want to get moving, The King's Rook Club has you covered. Running through the New Year and beyond, each weekend has a roster of performers that are worth checking out.

Let's start with the two-night Gathering at Chaffee's Christmas Party. Friday, Dec. 20 will feature Funktional Flow, backed up by local alt-rockers Royek (fresh out of the recording studio), pop-punk dynamos Do Not Call List, and an improvisational afterparty odyssey with Time-Mind. No stranger to the Rook stage (not to mention Chaffee's in 2022 and 2023), the Buffalo-based quintet Funktional Flow, brings a groovy mix of reggae, rock, and — you guessed it — funk to every show.

The following night will host the much-loved Syracuse powerhouse Sophistafunk. If you haven't caught them locally (including this year at Chaffee's), maybe you've seen them as the house band on *Guy's Ultimate Game Night*, the latest

offering from the Mayor of Flavortown himself, Guy Fieri. Joining them will be local heroes Phunkademic, Good 'N You?, and an after party with hip-hop/EDM artisan Grimace. Both nights will have food available courtesy of Jake Juliano, with vending from Hippie Hideout and Optimistic Apocalypse.

Just two days after the holiday, Friday, Dec. 27 will be "Rockin' Rook-Mas," a Christmas celebration with Pittsburgh family rock-and-rollers Chip and the Charge Ups, Common Spence (who just recently moved from Erie to Pittsburgh), rock up-and-comers Next to Cascade, and Moon Destroyer (featuring former Wasted Info members), all hosted by local drag superstar Shea D'Heaux. Guests dressed in holiday attire will be up for a special contest. "How it works is when you come into the Rook, we give you a wrapped gift! Inside will be either a nice gift with a green glow stick and a drink coupon or naughty gift with a red glowstick," explained Khristina Juarez, social media manager and booking agent for the KRC. "I know it'll be a fun Christmasy



Consider heading to the Kings Rook Club this December, as the schedule is stacked with a ton of can't-miss events including a Gathering at Chaffee's Christmas Party, Rockin' Rook-Mas with Shea D'Heaux, and a New Year's Eve night with a full slate of local and out-of-town music.

time with a nice sprinkle of drag to tie it together," wagered Shea D'Heaux (aka Jemmerio Harper). "I am going to be doing a little haunting Christmas look to fit the twisted Christmas theme." Krampus will be on hand for selfies and drink coupons for the naughty (red glowstick) guests, and headliners Chip and the Charge Ups will personally select a best-dressed guest.

On Friday, Dec. 31, Philadelphiaian synth-funk sensations Minka will be returning

to the King's Rook Club in the downstairs concert complex. Opening up for them will be Steely Mac, the Steely Dan tribute band fronted by McKenzie Sprague. At the same time, upstairs will feature And..., Dirty Cigarettes, Stim City, and DJC Dubz. — Nick Warren

Doors at 8 p.m. Dec. 20, 21, and 31; Doors at 9 p.m. Dec. 27 // Kings Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. // \$15 Dec. 20 and 21; \$10 Dec. 27 // For info and tickets: tickets.eriereader.com

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EVENTS

Come Together for Erie Ale Works' Festivus at Basement Transmissions

A *Seinfeld*-themed bash for the rest of us

MONDAY, DEC. 23

On the day before Christmas Eve, Erie Ale Works brings the beloved absurdity of Festivus to Basement Transmissions for a celebration of all things *Seinfeld* — and you're invited. Now in its ninth year, Festivus is Erie's must-attend holiday event that combines craft beer, local music, quirky games, and of course, a tribute to Frank Costanza's holiday of grievances.

"We riff on the traditions from that famous 1997 *Seinfeld* episode, but we've developed our own unique version of the event over the years," says Erie Ale Works co-owner Jeff McCullor. "It started as a small gathering but quickly grew, and now we've outgrown our original venue, and so moved to Basement Transmissions to accommodate the crowds."

What can newcomers expect? First and foremost, a night packed with local flavor. Erie Ale Works will be serving their signature brews while The Que Abides Pit Stop brings the food, Altered State Distillery pours the cocktails, and the stage is packed with the local musical talents of SANIS, LADDERS, and Fog Giant.

It wouldn't be Festivus without games — this year features a quirky bagel toss and a *Seinfeld* trivia competition hosted by local expert Matt Lebowitz. The event will also be emceed by Anthony Morelli of Flagship City Comedy, bringing even more goodwill to the night.



We've got a lot of problems with you people, and now, you're going to hear about them! Join the folks from Erie Ale Works, *Seinfeld* trivia master Matt Lebowitz, and local rockers SANIS, LADDERS, and Fog Giant for a night of fun Festivus traditions.

"If you want to bring your family to a fun, local event filled with good vibes, silliness, and a ton of laughs, Festivus is for you," says McCullor. "But if you'd rather escape family drama, we've got you covered, too."

Tickets are available now at a discounted rate through Erie Ale Works' website. Don't forget to submit your grievances ahead of time — after all, it's not Festivus without airing them out! — Aaron Mook

5 p.m. // Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11th St. // \$12 pre-sale, \$15 at the door // For admission and info visit: eriealeworks.com

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Curling Away the Winter Blues

French Creek Curling Club hosts classes and leagues

CONTINUING JAN. 4

As we well know, Erie winters can be long and arduous. With below freezing temperatures, poor driving conditions, and Vitamin D deficiencies, it's easy to develop a little bit of cabin fever. French Creek Curling Club offers a way for people to get out of the house and try something new through their Experience Curling classes and curling leagues.

French Creek Curling Club is a volunteer-run organization that began in 2016 in the Meadville area, later expanding to Erie. The club replicates a true curling experience with a full sheet of ice and the same 42-pound granite stones used in the Winter Olympics. Curling leagues and Experience Curling classes take place at the LECOM Sports Park from October through April.

Adam Reese, president and Grand National Curling Club representative described the classes as a combination of teaching and playing. "We spend about half of the time going through the basics about how you would deliver a stone, what sweeping does, and the general rules of the game, but then we want to carve out plenty of time to be able to play because we think that's really where the fun is."

Those who wish to continue curling on a regular basis can buy a membership with the club to substitute in leagues or buy a league of their own. Learning to curl or joining a league with French Creek Curling Club doesn't require any special equipment and can be played re-



Does your News Year's list of resolutions include trying new things? How about getting more exercise or meeting new people? Bang out all of these goals with Experience Curling — an introductory course and competition brought to you by the folks from the French Creek Curling Club.

gardless of athletic ability. "We've had members in their seventies play through a league and I think our youngest league member at the moment is 16, so it's a really wide variety," Reese said.

Reese describes the social aspect of curling as his favorite part. "It's not cutthroat, right?" Reese said, "You're trying to do the best that you can. Your opponent is trying to do the best they can. And when somebody makes a good shot, you're going to cheer for them. And they're going to cheer for you when you make a good shot. And then afterwards, we have some social time off the ice." — Alana Sabol

6:30 to 8:30 p.m. // LECOM Sports Park, 8159 Oliver Rd. // \$30 // For tickets and info: tickets.eriecurling.com or eriecurling.com

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Gem City Style

An interview with Leah Show of The Candle Box Company

By: Jessica Hunter

I recently had the opportunity to speak with local candlemaker Leah Show about the beginnings and growth of her business (Candle Box Company), the experience of being partnered with her mother, and what goes into creating a quality fragrance.

Jessica Hunter (JH): Leah, can you tell us a little bit about The Candle Box Company and how you got started.

Leah Show (LS): In 2015, I started making candles in my parents' basement. I wanted to see if I could turn it into a full time business. I scheduled as many candle events as possible to try to get our name out there. I would go door to door to businesses to see if they would be interested in wholesaling our products. We started seeing a significant increase in sales and decided to open up a small storefront. Our original store was about 500 square feet. It was a place where I could make and also sell my candles. This was perfect timing because during one of our weekend candle events, someone from the department store Bon-Ton came across our products. Bon-Ton placed an order with us to put Candle Box candles in 12 of their department stores. This was *huge* for our small business. We had continuous business with Bon-Ton until it went out of business in 2018.

Our wholesale orders started picking up after this exposure and we secured another large department store account with Christmas Tree Shops that continued for a few years.

We eventually moved into our current

JESSICA HUNTER



Owner of local candlemaking company the Candle Box, Leah Snow (right) has been making candles since 2015 and was joined in business by her mother Linda Show (left) in 2020. The two are now business partners and a mother-daughter candlemaking duo.

store location and Scent was born. We wanted a store that could house our candle brand but also let customers know that we sell other products. In essence, Scent is the home of Candle Box Company and other complementary products.

JH: What is the story behind the name of your brand?

LS: It took me weeks to come up with a name for my brand. I remember I was trying to think of business names related to "flames" or "light" but nothing felt

right. One day I was walking and saw a sign that said Bread Box and it was a business that made sandwiches. I had the instant idea of Candle Box with the tag line "Handcrafted candles." It was a perfect name for us.

JH: You are partners with your mother, Linda Show. Can you share how she got involved and how has it been working alongside your mom?

LS: Our candle business continued to grow and it was time that my mom joined me as an owner and operator of Candle Box. In 2020, we became a mother-daughter candlemaking duo. Together, we were able to bring a blend of experience, innovation, and fresh perspective to the brand.

I absolutely love working with my mom. I think it is very special that we get to be on this journey together. We are constantly making new memories together and we get to do something that we are proud of.

JH: Tell us about your product and the types of ingredients that you use. What is your favorite candle scent that you've created?

LS: We use all natural ingredients: Coconut wax, cotton wicks and high-quality candle fragrance oils. I wanted to make a product that I was proud of. I am so proud of each one of our candles. Ev-

ery single candle scent that we sell has been specially crafted and tested. We test each one of our candle wicks with the specific jar size and the fragrance oils to ensure a high quality burn. It was very important to me to create a product that my customers would enjoy.

My favorite candle scent that I've created is Firewood. It was one of the first scents that I introduced back in 2015. When I was first starting to make candles, I wanted to create a scent that captured the essence of walking outside on a fall day and smelling a bonfire. That particular smell is so comforting to me. After a lot of trial and error, I was able to come up with a fragrance blend that resembled the scent perfectly. Firewood has been our best seller for the past nine years.

JH: What's next for the Candle Box Company?

LS: We'll be having a Christmas Open House on Saturday, Dec. 21 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Spin the wheels for free items, discounts, and more!

Learn more about the Candle Box Company by visiting candleboxcompany.com

Jessica Hunter can be found at jessicahunter-photos.com



The Candle Box Company uses clean, all natural ingredients to make their original scent combinations. Co-owner Leah Show's favorite scent is their firewood candle – harkening back to childhood olfactory memories of fireplaces ablaze in autumn.



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The Top Five Best Films of 2024

A poignant and pertinent year for filmmaking

By: Forest Taylor

1. *I Saw the TV Glow*

Jane Schoenbrun proves to be one of the most fascinating new filmmakers with their neon-soaked surrealist horror film. Ostensibly a story about two young people and their obsession with a late-night TV show, Schoenbrun expertly portrays the comforting prison of nostalgia as well as the sheer terror of gender dysphoria. While mainly set in the latter half of the 1990s, their film feels horrifyingly relevant to the present day where political candidates spend hundreds of millions of dollars turning open transphobia into a winning political strategy. These next few years are going to be dark times for trans rights and that makes Schoenbrun's film all the more significant. They utilize the "empathy machine" to show the pure existential horror of feeling trapped in one's own body and in this era when a peoples' right to exist is becoming a political debate, Schoenbrun gives us a work of art that is, sadly, desperately needed right now. A trans horror masterpiece.

2. *The Beast*

While Bertrand Bonello's sci-fi/romance is based on a book written in the beginning of the last century, it manages to be the most relevant film of the year in this age where AI is becoming more and more ubiquitous in our lives. Following the love story of three incarnations of the same two people from 1910 to 2044, Bonello explores the depths of love in a world where emotions are slowly becoming drained from our lives. He seems to be saying that as we affix more of ourselves into our technology, we lose more of our genuine selves in the process. As facsimiles of humanity become ever more realistic, where does that leave our true humanity? He expresses this with a disorienting, dreamlike structure and some terrific performances from his two leads. Strange, surreal, romantic and sad, Bonello gives us something that is a rare feat: a science fiction film whose emotions are as powerful as its ideas.

3. *Anora*

Sean Baker has made a name for himself telling tragicomic stories about people on the bottom of the social hierarchy, and this twisted take on Cinderella may simultaneously be his most entertaining and tragic yet. Depicting the whirlwind romance between a Brooklyn sex worker and the son of Russian oligarchs, Baker addresses a depressing truth about the late-stage capitalist wasteland that America has become. In a world full of "side hustles" and "gig economies," we have turned everything, even love and romance itself, into another money-making enterprise. Despite the depressing realities of the film, it's also incredibly funny (in its own manic way) and expertly told, thanks to Baker's whip-smart writing and a star-making performance from Mikey Madison. We get whisked along with Ani through her fairy tale all the way to its inevitable but heartbreaking conclusion.

4. *Gasoline Rainbow*

Every generation gets the road movie it deserves and this film from the Ross brothers feels like it will soon become a classic in the subgenre. The story of five recent



high school graduates driving over 500 miles to see the Pacific Ocean before entering the real world is aimless and meandering, and I mean that in the best possible way. With no real plot or conflict, we can just exist with these characters and revel in the freedom of youth.

While clearly depicting the experiences of Gen Z, the film can appeal to anyone who remembers that precious short time between childhood and adulthood. Often feeling like home movie footage thanks to its use of an FS7 handheld camcorder, the film has an authentic, nearly documentary feel that makes the whole thing infectious to watch. We become simple observers of these kids on the road between the end and the beginning.

5. *Hit Man*

Films like *The Fall Guy* and *Twisters* seemed interested mainly in sharing with us the joys of the movies, but naturally, Richard Linklater dives the deepest into his

love of cinema with this guiltiest of guilty pleasures. Telling the (sort of) true story of a man who lived a double life as a college professor and phony contract killer, Linklater gets at a fundamental truth about the cinematic experience. Movies don't reflect life, they are an improvement on life. The unreality of the whole situation harkens back to the screwball comedies of the 1930s and '40s, something that has been sorely lacking in this age of hyperrealism. Sometimes we just want a bit of wish fulfillment in our entertainment, logic be damned, and what we really want to see is two impossibly beautiful people literally get away with murder. Easily one of the most entertaining films of the year!

Honorable Mentions

About Dry Grasses

La Chimera

The Substance

Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga

Hundreds of Beavers

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Mary Lynn Rote, LPC, CADC
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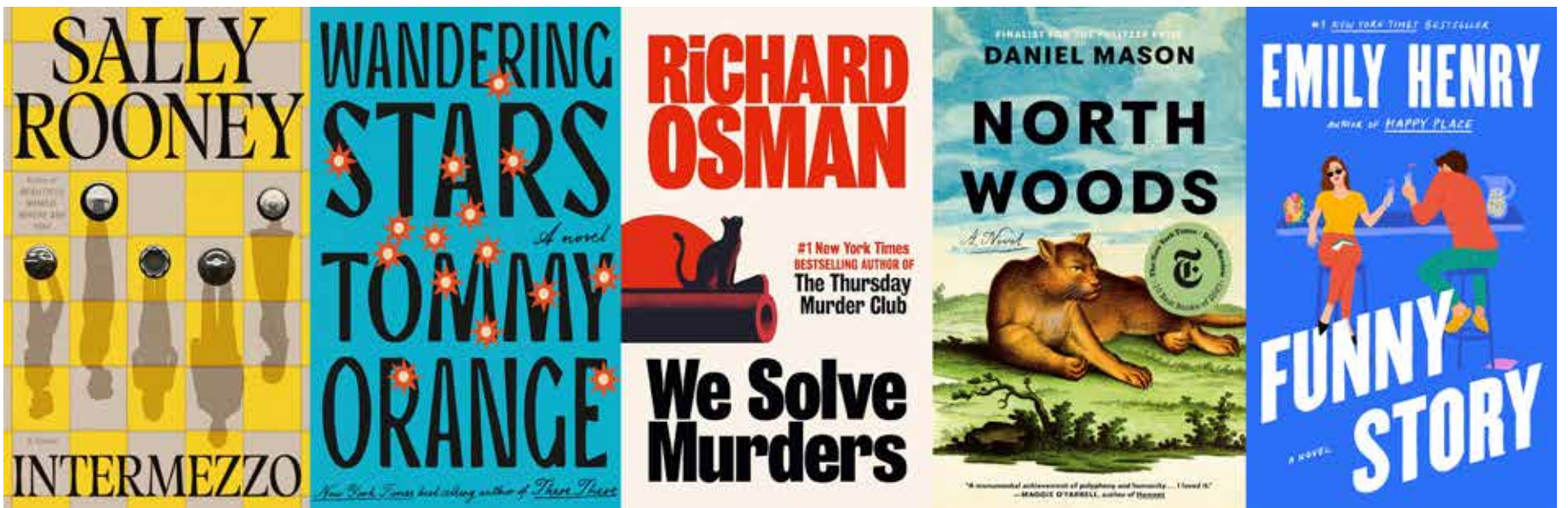


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Best Books of 2024

The best in fiction in a year of stellar fiction



Intermezzo by Sally Rooney

It is an absolute treat when a year contains a Sally Rooney release, as the author has yet to disappoint with her work. In her newest release, *Intermezzo*, Rooney hits the mark yet again.

The story follows two wildly different brothers, Peter and Ivan, as they navigate grief in the wake of their father's death. Peter, a Dublin lawyer and the elder brother by 10 years, finds himself torn between his casual relationship with a college student and the pull of his first love. Ivan, a 22-year-old pursuing a career in chess, finds himself falling for a 36-year-old divorcée — a point of contention between the brothers that has them pushing further away when they need each other the most.

In her unique, quotation-free style, Rooney once again delivers a story that will captivate and entrance readers. — Ally Kutz

Farrar, Straus and Giroux // 454 pages // Literary Fiction

Wandering Stars by Tommy Orange

If you've ever struggled to understand the concept of generational trauma, Tommy Orange has written a master class on how to perfectly craft it into story. The follow-up to his 2018 novel *There There*, Orange tackles a similar concept but does so by casting a much larger historical net. One need not have read *There There* to connect with *Wandering Stars* — it easily stands on its own — but it couldn't hurt and I promise you won't regret it. Both books are stunning and immaculately told while being simultaneously soul-crushing and matter-of-

fact.

Following, in a narrative way, the traumatic history of Indigenous Americans from the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 and the Carlisle Indian Industrial School up through to the present and subtly connecting those events through a single family's experience — it is grand and sweeping without being intimidating. Tackling un-taught American history in all of its brutal honesty while examining the nature of addiction and its connection to lived and inherited trauma — this book is vital, and should be required reading. — Erin Phillips

Knopf // 336 pages // Historical Fiction

We Solve Murders by Richard Osman

Following the success of his *Thursday Murder Club* series, many were anxious to see Richard Osman's latest debut and the success, or lack thereof, it would hold. The worry is baseless, though, as *We Solve Murders* is on par with the author's previous works and has earned itself a place on this list.

Amy Wheeler is a private security officer currently tasked with guarding a world-famous author, while her father-in-law Steve Wheeler is a retired police officer. The two lead wildly different lives — hers filled with adrenaline and danger, his with routine and quiet — but the two find themselves in the midst of a mystery when someone is out to get Amy and the only person who she trusts to help is Steve.

Storyline has never been the most important part of Osman's novels, but instead the characters: "If I asked you the plot of the last 10 crime books you have

read, you probably wouldn't remember them but you would remember how they made you feel ... that's why writing characters is most important to me — they have a big impact." Luckily, his characters and plot both pack a big punch in *We Solve Murders*, delivering a suspenseful yet delightful story that is difficult to put down. — Ally Kutz

Pamela Dorman Books // 400 pages // Mystery, Crime

North Woods by Daniel Mason

"...The only way to understand the world as something other than a tale of loss is to see it as a tale of change."

North Woods is a book whose genre is difficult to pin down — in the best way. In essence, it traces the history of a single structure on a plot of land from the very beginning of Colonial America, through all of American history, and into the (subtly apocalyptic) future. It tells the story of two Puritan lovers who ran away to pursue their forbidden affair and found this plot of land, a British Revolutionary soldier turned farmer, obsessed with proliferating the perfect apple, a pair of spinster twins, an artist, a ubiquitous puma, and more — and their relationship and connection to the ever-changing land that has existed long before they arrived.

North Woods tells the tale of a constantly-changing America through its people and the dramatic natural effects of their simple existence. It has a spooky element that is not at all cheesy, but feels more like living and dying history. For someone like me who physically feels the oldness of a place by being in it,

I felt a deep connection to this perfectly written book and I was so sad when it ended. I can't wait to see what Mason does next. — Erin Phillips

Random House // 384 pages // Historical Fiction

Funny Story by Emily Henry

When looking for the best in contemporary romance, look no further than Emily Henry. With an impressive number of hits under her belt (*Beach Read*, *Happy Place*, and *Book Lovers*, just to name a few), she continues to shine in her latest, *Funny Story*.

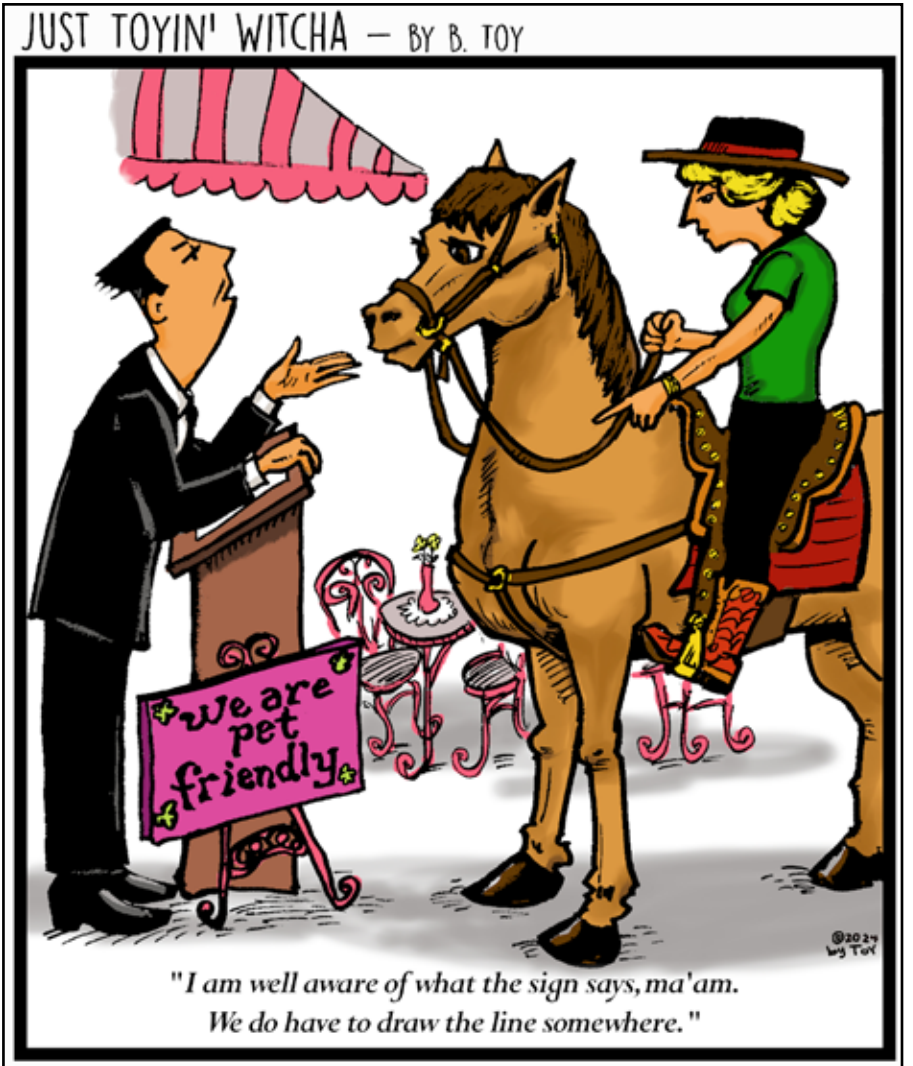
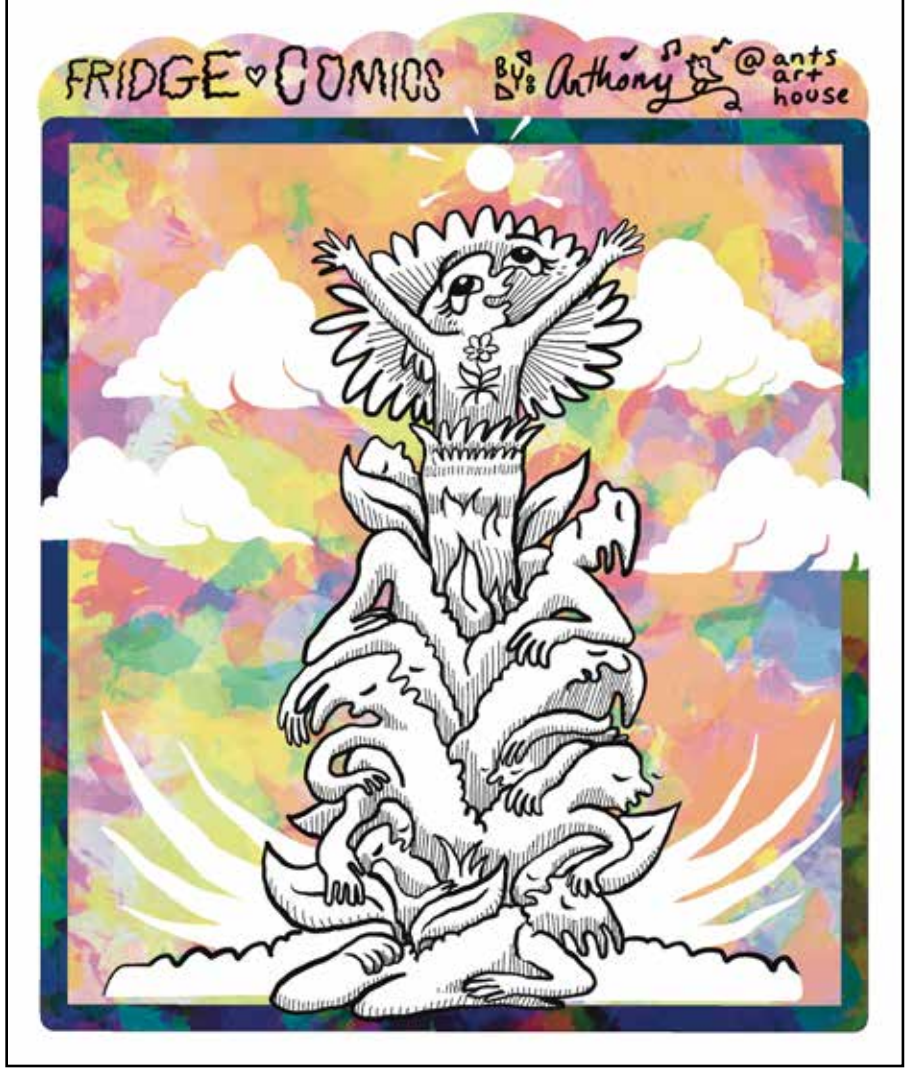
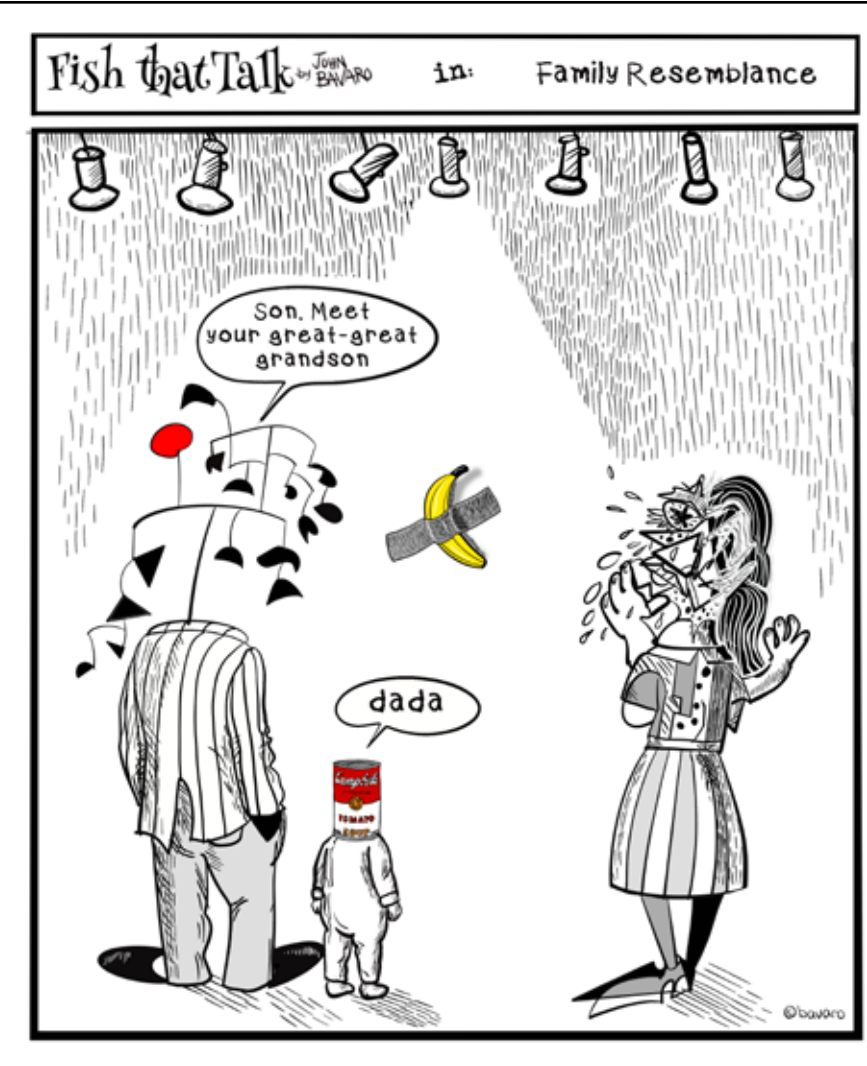
Daphne is completely stranded: after moving with her fiancé Peter to his hometown, he leaves her after realizing he's in love with his childhood best friend Petra. Now with no friends or family and only her dream job as a children's librarian, she proposes to be roommates with Petra's ex, Miles. The two mainly avoid each other until one night, they hatch a plan: posting deliberately misleading photos of summer adventures together in an attempt to make both of their exes jealous — but the adventures may lead to a new romance for the unlikely pair.

Henry is a leading voice in her genre and *Funny Story* is further proof of the author's skill and will leave readers ready to see where Daphne and Miles go. —Ally Kutz

Berkley // 400 pages // Contemporary Romance

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Top Five Local Albums of 2024

The best and brightest from Erie musicians

The local original music scene in Erie has been growing and evolving for generations. The amount and variation of talent in our community is deserving of our support, and is something we should all be proud of. The sheer quantity has reached such heights that in 2024, we reviewed the most local releases in our publication's history. As is now tradition, each of our regular album review contributors chose their favorite local original album to feature for our top five local albums of the year. For some local acts, this support is so important — we introduce those outside the usual circles to new music. Maybe give a listen to someone new from this list and make a local musician's day!

Smilo & the Ghost // *Twang & Fire*

Lacustrine harefooters making hard times and hard work sound like sweet release from the evils of this life. Lonesome enough to feel familiar, somber enough to be upbeat. Hometown anti-hero with a rapidly unfolding fan base providing uplifting tempos for the win. — Melissa Sullivan Shimek



Elle Taylor // *See the Sun*

Elle Taylor's sophomore album *See the Sun* doubles down on the instantly recognizable songwriting that made *Taken Me A While* such an interesting debut. Compiling reworked demos and fresh tracks, the album springs to life with contributions from local players such as Larry Wheaton and Ken Tate. Radiating a sense of bright optimism even in times of emotional crises, *See the Sun* continues Taylor's streak as one of the more unique singer-songwriter acts in Erie. — Aaron Mook

Common Spence // *Floor Time*

A debut born out of honesty and a heart-felt chance to articulate the emotions that swirl around in our heads, the six tracks of *Floor Time* feel intimate and immediate. A blend of folk-punk and lo-fi pop, each song leaves you with an unexpected lyrical sentiment that will likely stick with you for days. — Nick Warren

with Sam Donahue of Penny Racer, *February* channels the band's high-octane live energy, setting them up as a force to continue watching in the local music scene. — Aaron Mook

Machine Elvis // *Dog Gods*

Multi-instrumentalist Brent Knight from Cambridge Springs blends indie, prog, and psychedelic sounds to make a unique record filled with catchy lyrics and flowing melodies. Songs about life and the world we live in makes this an introspective record, worthy of several listens. — Larry Wheaton

LADDERS // *February*

LADDERS' *February* EP successfully blends influences from early 2000s emo, screamo, and metalcore acts, capturing both raw energy and nostalgic melodies. Recorded

The Top Five Favorite Albums of 2024

All of our regular album reviewers chime in with their most-spun favorites

Once again, we've sourced "best albums of the year" opinions from five of our regular album review contributors — and the diversity of their choices represents the diversity of their individual tastes, offering a wide variety of genres. Everything from smash pop hits to solemn singer-songwriters, indie hip-hop to sludgy heavy metal, and punk rock to grunge nostalgia are represented in the following lists. Be sure to check out the online version of this article which will include a custom made playlist featuring a favorite track from each album. Happy listening!

Nathaniel Clark

1. Charli XCX // *Brat*

2024 has been Charli XCX's charreuse-colored oyster. We have just been living in it.

2. Adrienne Lenker // *Bright Future*

No matter if you stop at the first song or the last, this album's beautiful acoustics and cracked vocals will leave an impression on you.

3. Father John Misty // *Mahashmashana*

Part-mass exodus. Part-musical culmination. All Father John Misty.

4. Britney Howard // *What Now?*

Transcending her trademark folk sound toward psychedelics, the singer-songwriter continues to stun.

5. Chat Pile // *Cool World*

This sludge-coated wall of noise is the perfect place to scream about our current world.

EXTRAS:

Geordie Greep // *The New Sound*

Vampire Weekend // *Only God Was Above Us*

Magdalena Bay // *Imaginal Disk*

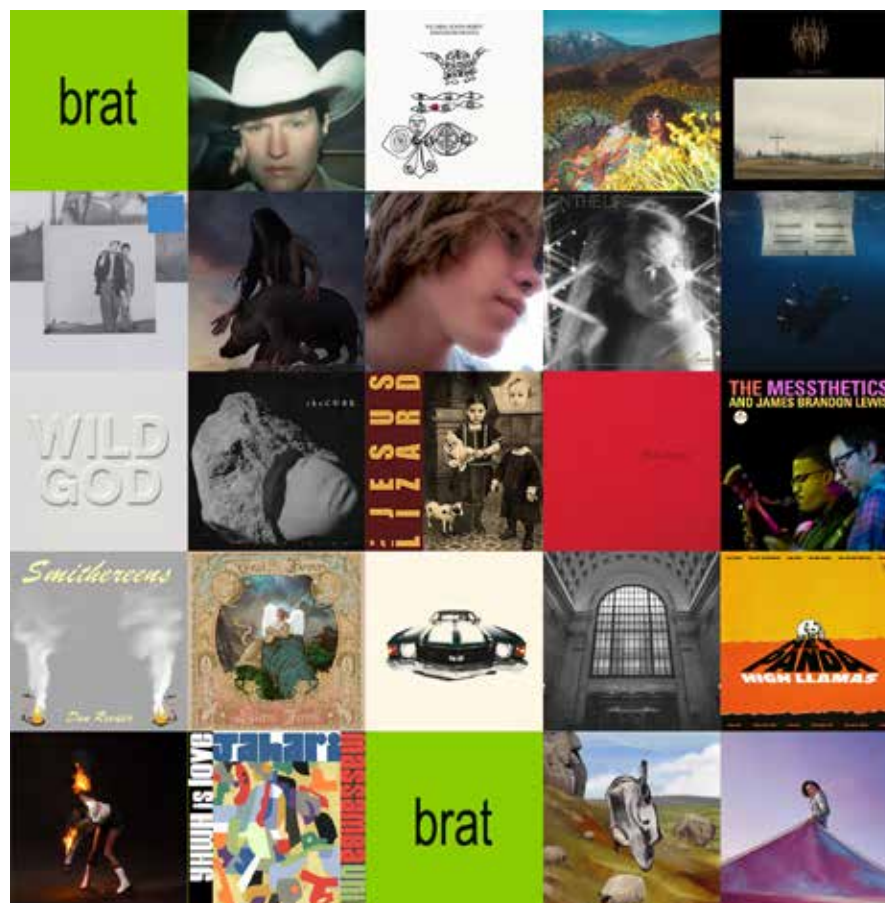
Tyler, the Creator // *CHROMAKOPIA*

The Last Dinner Party // *Prelude to Ecstasy*

Aaron Mook

1. Hovvdy // *Hovvdy*

A defining double album from the indie-pop duo that splits the difference



MUSIC

between country-leaning acoustic guitars and electronic percussion, landing on something that feels instantly familiar and comforting.

2. Mannequin Pussy // *I Got Heaven*
Cult-favorite punk rockers expand their palette to incorporate the sounds of riffy alt-rock, blistering hardcore, and gorgeous dream-pop on their most interesting and accessible album to date.

3. Porches // *Shirt*
Synth-pop's pretty boy leans even further back towards his guitar-rock roots, folding medieval occult motifs into a record that blends beauty and darkness as well as it does distorted guitars and indie-pop songwriting.

4. Molly Lewis // *On the Lips*
A cinematic debut LP from professional whistler Molly Lewis, which uses horns and other serene, jazzy textures to conjure the surreal worlds of visual artists like David Lynch and the Coen brothers.

5. Billie Eilish // *Hit Me Hard and Soft*
The transformative pop pioneer sheds her Top 40 shackles in favor of her most mature album to date, managing to create something completely cohesive despite spanning her most varied styles, themes, and vocal performances yet.

EXTRAS:

Chat Pile // *Cool World*
Father John Misty // *Mahashmashana*
DIIV // *Frog in Boiling Water*
MJ Lenderman // *Manning Fireworks*
Spirit of the Beehive // *You'll Have to Lose Something*

Larry Wheaton

1. Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds // *Wild God*

Nick Cave ages into Leonard Cohen territory with poignant lyrics and slower tempos in *Wild God* — wherein he preaches about finding peace in a world full of chaos. This is the first record to feature writing credits beyond Cave and Ellis, including the entire Bad Seeds group, since 2016's *Skeleton Tree*, giving it a familiar yet fresh feel.

2. The Cure // *Songs of a Lost World*
If your favorite Cure album is their masterpiece *Disintegration*, then *Songs of a Lost World* is its companion. Returning with atmospheric tones, fuzz-covered psychedelic guitars, and drone rhythms, this album will take you back to 1989.

3. The Jesus Lizard // *Rack*
With grunge music making a comeback, these underdogs of the alternative era have returned with their first album in 24 years. The Jesus Lizard haven't slowed down with age, instead they pick it back up with the same blistering sound that made them a must-see live band in the '90s.

4. Redd Kross // *Redd Kross*
After playing together for over 40 years and fresh off the heels of their documentary, Redd Kross delivers a bubblegum pop-punk record that has so many tasty riffs and sweet hooks that you have to see your dentist after a listen. Blending the Osmonds with Black Flag, it's no wonder that they are the Cheap Trick of the punk scene.

5. The Messthetics, James Brandon Lewis // *The Messthetics and James*

Brandon Lewis

The collaboration of The Messthetics (featuring the rhythm section from Fugazi) and saxophonist Brandon Lewis sees jazz entering into punk territory. These artists first collaborated on the single "Fear Not" in 2022, followed by a tour (including a stop in Erie), then decided to come together for one of the most unique releases of 2024. This instrumental record is perfect for a quiet evening in or a few sixers in the garage with friends.

Once the prettiest girl on the street corner with a guitar case full of change, she is now one of the reigning queens of Appalachia.

3. Billy Strings // *Highway Prayers*
Your pizza delivery boyfriend pulls up in his black Camaro, blaring a Doc Watson/Eagles mixtape. He says, "Jump in! We're gonna do some mushrooms at the Crosby, Stills, & Nash laser light show."

4. Shellac // *To All Trains*

Once again, we've sourced "best albums of the year" opinions from five of our regular album review contributors — and the diversity of their choices represents the diversity of their individual tastes, offering a wide variety of genres. Everything from smash pop hits to solemn singer-songwriters, indie hip-hop to sludgy heavy metal, and punk rock to grunge nostalgia are represented.

EXTRAS:

Guided By Voices // *Strut Kings*
Grateful Dead // *Duke '78 (Live)*
Judas Priest // *Invincible Shield*
King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard // *Flight b741*
CNTS // *Thoughts & Prayers*

You never realized how spot on and hilarious the irritating smart-ass kid sitting behind you in physics class was until he just wasn't there one day. Years from now, you'll find the well-honed, encouraging quip he buried in your yearbook. Rest in peace, Steve Albini.

Melissa Sullivan Shimek

1. Dan Reeder // *Smithereens*
What happens when the angel food cake on one shoulder and the deviled eggs on the other both share the same philosophies and every idea seems like a decent proposal? Dan Reeder happens.

2. Sierra Ferrell // *Trail of Flowers*
Grandma always said you can't polish a turd, but you can bedazzle a busker.

5. High Llamas // *Hey Panda*
In the dappled sunlight of *Pet Sounds*, an optimistic Obilio wanders with his trusty dog Trans-vocoder. They join forces with sage Caetano Veloso in search of a most mellow Sheila E.

EXTRAS:

Charley Crockett // *Visions of Dallas*
Nathaniel Rateliff & the Night Sweats

TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



MUSIC

// *South of Here*

Kim Deal // *Nobody Loves You More*
Guided by Voices // *Strut of Kings*
Joan Armatrading // *How Did This Happen* and *What Does It Now Mean*

Nick Warren

1. St. Vincent // *All Born Screaming*
Seemingly an amalgamation of all of her past identities, this album eases between dark and tender art-rock, screaming industrial, neo-psychedelia, and new wave polyrhythms without ever losing the point

2. Jahari Massamba Unit // *YHWH Is Love*
Captivating and meditative, this album lands so high on the list thanks to its pure listenability, even if it's sometimes in the background. Let Madlib and drummer Karriem Riggins take you on a laidback, spiritual journey from start to finish.

3. Charli XCX // *Brat*

While it's probably my fourth-favorite album from the British dance diva, it's undoubtedly her most important.

Not much else needs to be said about this cultural phenomenon and instant classic.

4. English Teacher // *This Could Be Texas*

This astonishing debut from the Leeds quartet is a wildly inventive blend of indie pop and post-rock. Quirky, angular, hypnotic, and extremely intelligent, it's a gift.

5. Cassandra Jenkins // *My Light, My Destroyer*


With the ability to elevate art-rock to fine art, Cassandra Jenkins can create a dreamlike atmosphere like none other. The airy poetry, lilting melodies, and sophisticated instrumentation are beautiful and perplexing.

EXTRAS:


The Last Dinner Party // *Prelude to Ecstasy*
Sprints // *Letter to Self*
Ducks, Ltd. // *Harm's Way*
Bolis Pupul // *Letter to You*
Aaron West and the Roaring Twenties // *In Lieu of Flowers*



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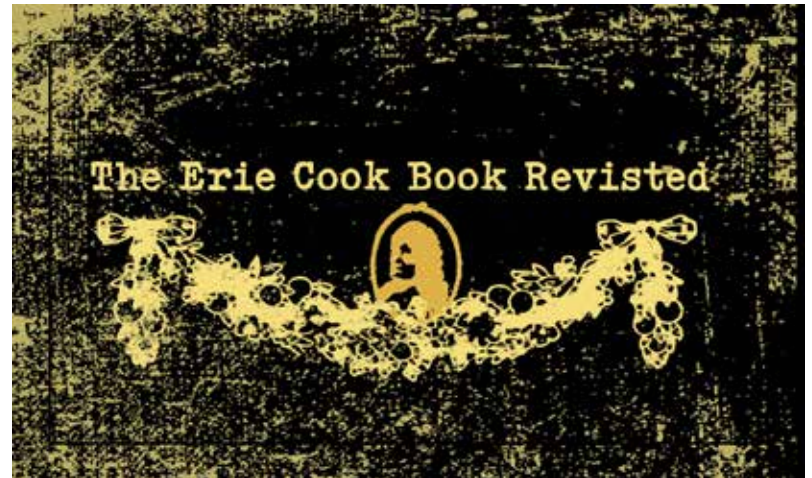
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SCAN ME

FOOD



The Erie Cookbook Revisited: How To Make A Nice Gravy

And a bonus Chicken Pie

By: Morgan Yezzi

In the 1881 *Erie Cook Book*, Ms. Laura C. Sterrett posits, “How to make a nice gravy is a problem many home cooks never solve. Remember that grease is not gravy, neither is raw flour. Almost any kind of meat-liquor or stock, from which fat has been removed, may be made into a gravy by adding seasonings and a thickening paste. When thickened with raw flour, it must boil or the gravy will taste like a gummy paste.”

Makes four cups gravy

2 tablespoons butter
Scant 1/4 cup flour
4 cups stock
Salt and pepper

Making a gravy requires careful attention. Place the butter into a saucepan over medium heat. As the butter begins to melt, whisk in the flour. Continue whisking until the mixture darkens to a tan color, ensuring it is smooth and not mealy. Add in one cup of hot stock and whisk until thickened and smooth. Add in the rest of the stock and rapidly simmer the gravy for five to seven minutes until thickened.

If the flour and butter is mealy, remove the pan from the heat and whisk in 1 more tablespoon of flour.

Bonus! Chicken Pie

Deconstruct a 5-pound chicken and add it to a large pot of hot water, covering the chicken by 1 inch. Season the water with one tablespoon of salt, pepper, and bay leaves, simmer for 40 minutes. Remove the chicken and when it is cool, chop it into cubes. Make a gravy by using the recipe above with the resulting chicken liquor (i.e. stock). Line a large baking dish with biscuit dough or a pie crust. Cover the dough in chicken and gravy and bake at 375 for one hour until the gravy is bubbling.

Makes one large chicken pie

If using pie dough, par bake for 25 minutes.

Revised from Laura Sterrett's recipes for "Good Gravy" and "Chicken Pie" from pages 34 and 140 of The Erie Cook Book.

CALENDAR

The best place to promote your events online and in print.



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Fri 12/13
Todd Paropacic + Ionesav: New Moving Pictures
 @ 5pm / Free
 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Featured



JIMKATA w/ 5AM Trio & WeazilDust (Late Set)
 @ 9pm / \$15
 King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street



Open Mic Teaching Workshop Hosted by Terry Crebel (Upstairs)
 @ 8pm / \$2
 King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street

Fri 12/20

Todd Paropacic + Ionesav: New Moving Pictures
 @ 5pm / Free
 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Candlelight: The Best of The Beatles
 @ 7pm / Free
 First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant, 250 West 7th Street. fever@eventvesta.com

Who's Holiday
 @ 7:30pm / \$20
 PACA, 1505 State Street

Featured



Gathering at Chaffee's Christmas Party (WEEKEND PASS)
 @ 9pm / \$25
 Dec 20th - Dec 21st
 King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street



Gathering at Chaffee's Christmas Party (FRIDAY ONLY)
 @ 9pm / \$15
 King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street

Candlelight: Holiday Special featuring "The Nutcracker" and More
 @ 9:30pm / Free
 First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant, 250 West 7th Street. fever@eventvesta.com

Sat 12/21

Todd Paropacic + Ionesav: New Moving Pictures
 @ 12pm / Free
 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Who's Holiday
 @ 7:30pm / \$20
 PACA, 1505 State Street

CLUB NAT
 @ 8pm / \$10
 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Gathering at Chaffee's Christmas Party (SATURDAY ONLY)
 @ 9pm / \$15
 King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street

Featured



STIM CITY : CLUB HOUSE 3.2
 @ 10pm / \$10
 Dec 21st - Dec 22nd
 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street



Sun 12/22

Todd Paropacic + Ionesav: New Moving Pictures
 @ 12pm / Free
 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Miller Mistletoe Mile Run/ Walk
 @ 6pm / \$20
 The Skunk and Goat Tavern, 17 West Main Street, North East

Tue 12/24

Winavette.com Charity Corvette Raffle
 @ 1pm / \$50
 Winavette.com sponsored by St. Jude the Apostle Parish. Win this 2024 1LT Corvette Convertible Stingray or \$50K! This year we are offering over \$100k in prizes. Visit winavette.com for your chance! Saint Jude the Apostle Church, 2801 West 6th Street. car@sain tjude.church, 814-833-0927

Fri 12/27

Featured



Headliner James Camacho at Werner Books and Coffee
 @ 7pm / \$15-\$20
 Werner Books and Coffee, 3608 Liberty Street



Featured



Rockin' Rook-Mas A Naughty or Nice Theme Party ft. Holiday Hostess Shea D'eaux
 @ 9pm / \$6
 King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street



Sat 12/28

Erie Otters vs. Guelph Storm
 @ 7pm
 Erie Insurance Arena

STIM CITY : SILENT NIGHT
 @ 10pm / \$10
 Dec 28th - Dec 29th
 FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

Sat 1/04

Featured



Experience Curling!
 @ 6:30pm / \$30
 LECOM Sports Park, 8159 Oliver Road



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.



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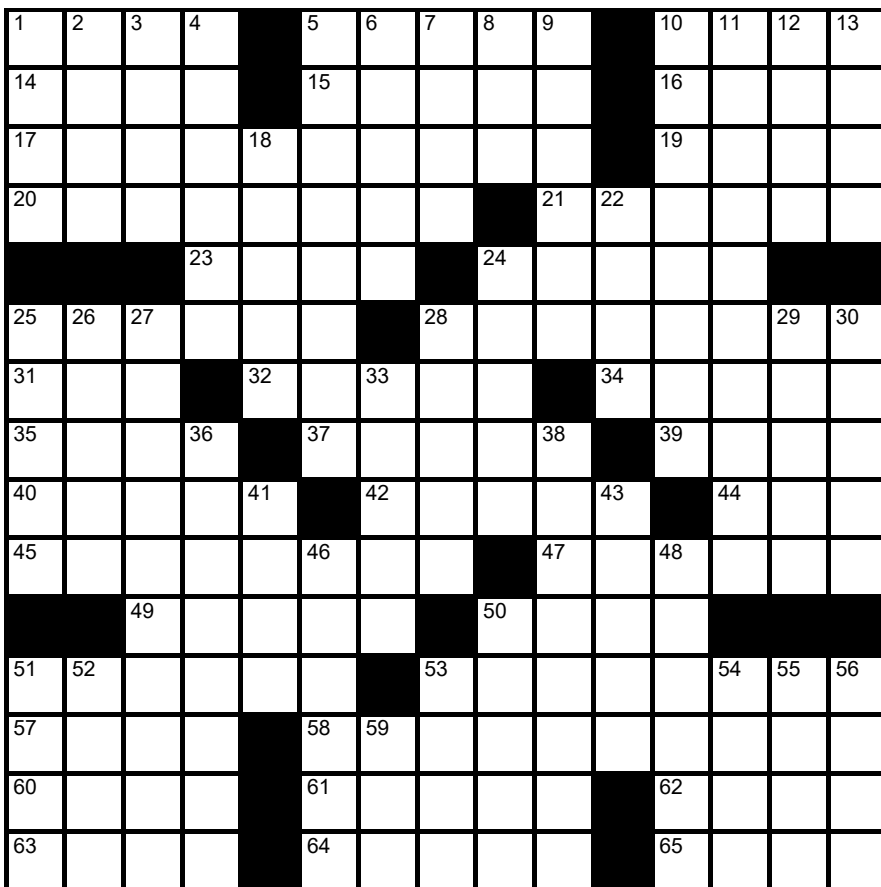
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CROSSWORD



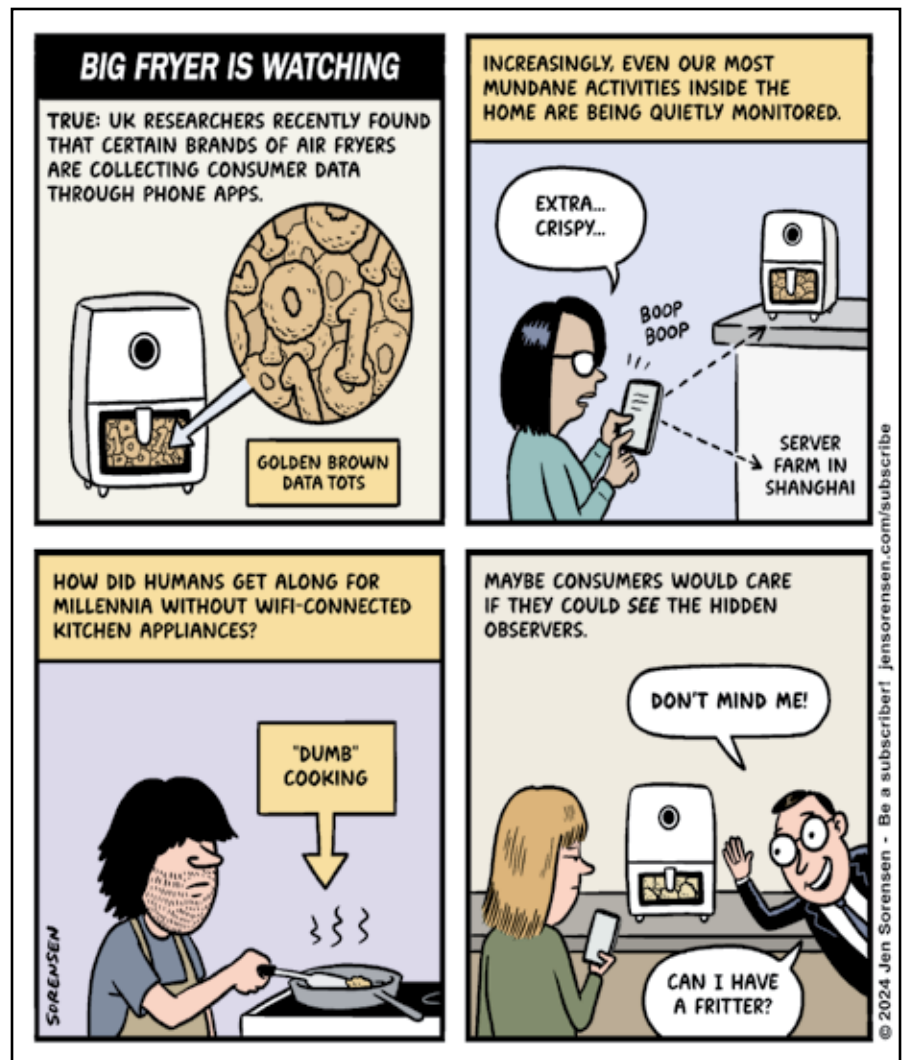
Across

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

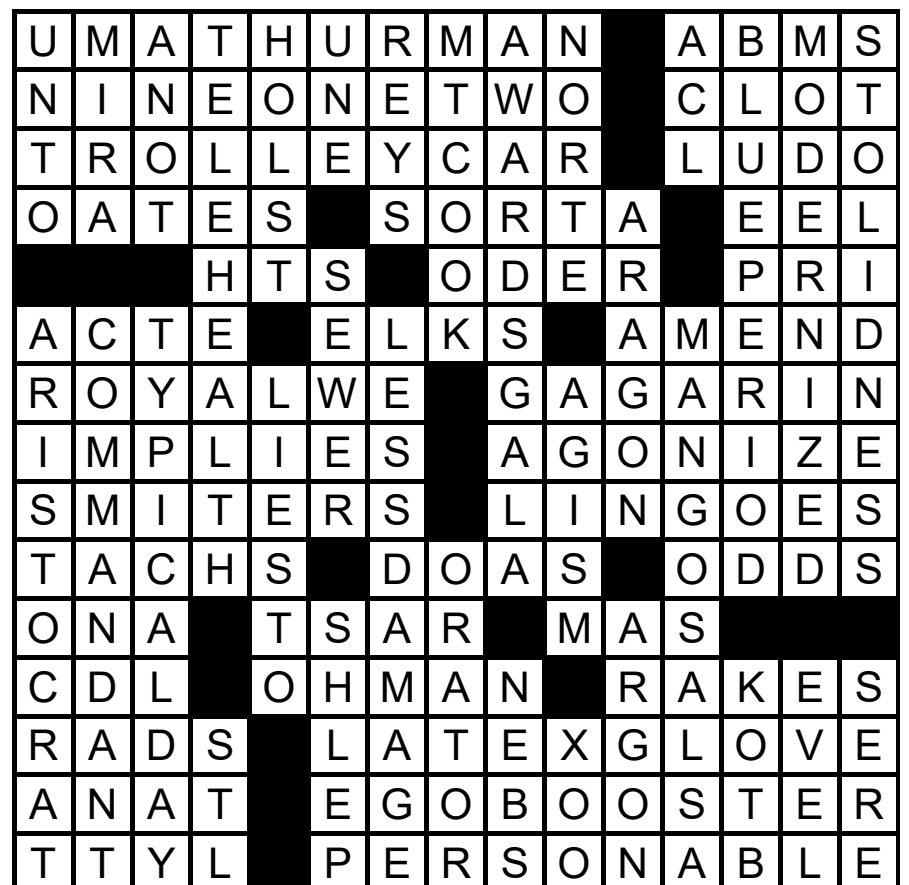
"Clue"

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

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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