



ERIE READER

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The Food Issue

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From the Editor

A fork in the road

These days, I find myself wondering if those random Facebook "friends" in my feed who voted for Trump because their grocery bills were so expensive are feeling good about their votes right now. Not the raging, red-hat MAGA cult members, but just the casual Trump voter. You guys are cool with aligning ourselves with Russia and against the rest of the world? The vilification of federal employees? The guy who helps you get a replacement Social Security card or the therapist who serves disabled veterans with PTSD — they're public enemy number one all of a sudden? These federal employees are not just Democratic voters — the Trump administration is alienating their own constituents with these chainsaw cuts. This is the time for dissatisfied *Republican* voters to speak up. Because it is increasingly feeling like the checks and balances in place to protect the American people from this kind of takeover are not as strong as we thought they once were.

So where are we left? At a fork in the road, one could say.

One road leads to the destruction of a government that functions in service to its people. The other? Radical community building? Economic and labor withdrawal? A revolution? History has proven time and again that, despite so many attempts to repress it, the power ultimately lies with the people. And if we're going to have a revolution, we're going to need to eat (how about that segue?).

Our Food Issue is, among our writers and editors, always a favorite. A palate cleanser. A chance to support some local establishments and enjoy the pleasure of good company over a satisfying meal. And our Food Issue this month highlights that — we have our annual Can't Miss Dishes list of some off-the-beaten-path fare that we'd hate for you to miss out on. We've also done a local Food Fight, where our writers and editors go toe-to-toe in a favorite Erie food standoff (all for fun — we still all love each other, I assure you). And, food-wise, we're highlighting some of Erie's immigrant-run restaurants like Kang's Steak and Grill and our booming Mexican food scene, as well as a local bakery that is as focused on mutual aid and community building as they are on creating mouth-watering, flaky pastry.

Additionally, and still revolution-adjacent, we're introducing a new reporter in this issue. Alana Sabol has been a contributing writer for the Reader since 2023 and, due in large part to your support and subscriptions (check out the SUBSCRIBE link on our homepage to contribute), we've been able to hire her on part-time to expand the Reader's local news coverage. Alana will be attending and reporting on ALL City and County Council meetings as well as select special committee meetings, press conferences, public input sessions, and more. The Reader Beat (as we've dubbed it) will be constantly updated on our website and a monthly summary will appear in print (see within). This kind of local government reporting has effectively gone away in our community over the past decade or so and now, more than ever, it is important that the people of Erie stay informed about what's happening in our own backyard.

Supporting local journalism is paramount right now — the way people get their news will be increasingly railroaded, silenced, or skewed and, as you may have heard, the Erie Reader is Erie's ONLY local voice for arts, news, and culture. And while our content is and always will be free to read, it is not free to make. We deeply appreciate your support as we move down one of those forks in the road together.

The Politics of Style: Erie's 2025 Mayoral Race

Incumbent Joe Schember, challenger Daria Devlin have different paradigms of leadership

By: Jeff Bloodworth

“Politics,” Pat Cuneo told me, “is the damndest thing.” If anyone should know, it’s Pat Cuneo. The retired Erie Times-News journalist covered Erie and Pennsylvania state politics for decades. But this May’s mayoral race has left the veteran journalist befuddled.

Cuneo says of Mayor Joe Schember’s tenure, “The city is far better off than it was 10 years ago.” At the same time, he senses a “vibe change.” To Cuneo, many voters think “there isn’t as much progress as there should be. There is grumbling about the city being stuck in the status quo.”

Joe Schember, the two-term Democratic incumbent, is the betting favorite. Homicides are down. Jobs are up. Taxes are steady. And the mayor can point to a series of important-sounding acronyms — EDDC, LERTA, and CRIZ, that he helped champion. Through the Erie Downtown Development Corporation (EDDC), a more upscale aesthetic has rallied Erie’s downtown. The Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act (LERTA) is a tax abatement program for home and business improvements that spurred hundreds of millions in investments. And the City Revitalization and Improvement Zone (CRIZ) is a tax increment financing district (i.e. a designated geographic area in which property tax rates are “frozen” for a set period — usually decades — to encourage development) that will, as Schember told me, “Result in more businesses and more people moving into the City of Erie.”

Yet, Schember faces a serious primary challenger from fellow Democrat Daria Devlin. The 47-year-old Erie native and UPMC Hamot’s director of social impact has the resume. On the boards of Erie Schools, the Port Authority, and the Erie Land Bank, she possesses knowledge of city government and executive experience in directing nonprofits. Joe Morris, a political scientist and dean of Mercyhurst University’s School of Intelligence said, “Devlin has solid credentials. She’s a high-quality challenger.” Adding to her aptitude are the vibes. Echoing Cuneo, Morris told me, “I’m of the belief this is a ‘time for a change’ moment. Mayors come to office with energy that they pursue effectively [for a while] but at some point, the energy [dwindles].”

Schember is anything but complacent. In my sit-down with the mayor he credited “his great team” for hundreds of new jobs, millions in federal grants, cost-cutting, and a balanced budget. His chief of staff, Renee Lamis, said of the 74-year-old mayor, “he’s the Energizer bunny. He goes and goes and goes from one meeting to the next from early morning until late at night. We [the staff] are all amazed by his workload and level of commitment.” The mayor may be a septuagenarian, but Cuneo observes, “He’s everywhere all at once.”

Mention the mayor to most anyone in Erie and

CONTRIBUTED



Incumbent Mayor Joe Schember will be running for his third and final term in November. He will face a Democratic primary challenger in Daria Devlin, UPMC Hamot’s Director of social impact. Jeff Bloodworth takes a look at both Schember’s and Devlin’s experience and leadership style as they head towards May’s primary.

you’ll soon hear, “Joe’s a good guy.” In politics, likability is usually synonymous with electability. Yet, the mayor has his critics — and they claim his “good guy” leadership style holds the city back.

Daria Devlin is taking direct aim at this vulnerability — that the mayor is likable and visible but not deeply engaged. She warns the city is facing a \$12 to 15 million structural deficit that could invoke an Act 47 state takeover of the city. Ultimately, she told me, “If we are fine with things being ‘fine,’ that’s one thing — but Erie is at a pivotal moment. If city hall is not engaged, then our success is not what it could be. We need real problem-solving and energy. We are 75 percent of the way there, but to get to the next level, we need more.”

Devlin has deep Erie roots. The daughter of the Holy Nativity Church’s parish rector, Devlin grew up calling the rectory and the lower east side home. Cuneo told me that these roots mean, “Devlin is a good Erie name.” What she lacks, according to him, is an issue. Or as he explained, “Finance? Debt? Not sexy. It sounds like a superhuman effort to make this into a race. Are there really edgy issues? There are issues — but are they edgy?” Devlin admitted that her top issues — education, housing, and public safety — “ain’t sexy,” but these matters revolve around a common theme, which are, in her words, to “make Erie a place where young people want to be.” And for that, she claims Erie needs engaged leadership.

A century ago, Erie was a veritable boomtown. Industrial jobs attracted immigrants. Between 1910

and 1940, the city’s population nearly doubled. Like so many Rust Belt cities, Erie reached a demographic peak — 140,000 in the 1960s. At that time, Erie was roughly the same size as Nashville, Tennessee. Sixty years later, Nashville is the boomtown. Automation, deindustrialization, and suburbanization, meanwhile, have cut Erie’s population down to below 100,000. When people leave or die, their tax payments go with them. What is left behind is a smaller population charged with maintaining the same physically sized city. Urban decline ensues, which only exacerbates further decay, and yet more brain drain. Wash. Rinse. Repeat. This is the Rust Belt doom loop. These issues pre-dated Schember’s tenure who, to his credit, stabilized the patient. But Devlin believes the patient needs heroic medicine — not just palliative care.

On the surface the Schember-Devlin race is a generational divide pitting a Boomer against a Gen Xer. But it is, more deeply, a contest of leadership philosophy. Devlin told me, “This is about leadership. Change is hard. Change is difficult. This race is a moment of choice between the way we have always done things and how we can find a new way forward.” Schember responded to these critiques, “That’s totally unfounded. I’m totally involved. I have a great team. They do the work, and I direct them.” Lamis added, the “[mayor’s] leadership is misunderstood. He listens. He won’t dictate. Once he hears everything, he will make a decision. Then everyone implements it. He’s not a micro-manager.”

The nearest hint of a scandal is the location of Daria Devlin's campaign office. Located at 3208 Peach St., the building was used by State Senator Dan Laughlin as his 2024 reelection headquarters. Lori Radder, Devlin's campaign manager, brushed aside rumors of a Laughlin-Devlin alliance. She laughed and told me, "It is there [the Devlin office] because the location was great and the owner gave us a great rate because he supports the campaign. We were lucky to get it."

Without a scandal or a polarizing personality — Erie's mayoral race will be decidedly old-fashioned. Voters will cast a ballot on an actual issue, "leadership style."

The mayor's critics charge he is too hands-off and delegates far too much authority to his chief of staff, Renee Lamis. A former city hall staffer told me, "It is common knowledge that Renee sells and drives the agenda." But then this person paused and wondered, "What's wrong with that?" If the results are good, isn't that a sign of solid leadership?

Dave Forrest, Erie's former city planner, has a different theory. The 63-year-old Philadelphia native has spent his entire career in municipal management. He told me, "I'm hoping Joe loses, we need better leadership. Schember, he's not active. The chief of staff really runs the town." Forrest's concerns are focused on a lack of "code enforcement." Forrest explained that code enforcement pushes property owners to maintain their homes and rentals. This not only drives investment, but it is utterly essential in maintaining affordable, quality housing, of which

Erie lacks.

Forrest told me, "Look around the city, rental properties aren't up to code. The city won't provide any notices of violations." In Forrest's observation, the mayor's office "gets along with everyone. They never cross swords. They never say no." Forrest reports that early in Schember's tenure, property owners complained about code violations. City hall stopped issuing substantive code violations. Ultimately, Forrest charged, "If you are going to be in leadership, you will possibly piss people off — that's the price of leadership."

David Schleicher tells me this is normal. The Walter E. Meyer Professor of Property and Urban Law at Yale Law School reports that in every American city, "local institutions...are responsive to folks who show up, homeowners and interest groups." Chuck Nelson, a city councilman, has a front row seat for the show that is city government. He told me, "Renee Lamis has a huge role. That's the team he has built. Trust the team he has built." Nelson also sees a mayor who delegates and lets council play its role. But he also stressed, "His team has executed the [policies]. In the last eight years, you can see great improvements in the city. Just look downtown — drive down State Street. Maintain the momentum."

Leadership style may be the issue, but the election will be decided by organization and the Democratic primary. No Republican has even bothered to file. Devlin admits, "He [Schember] has a huge advantage in name recognition." And Schember has promised a

robust door-to-door operation. Observers expect a meager turnout, 10,000 or so voters. Nelson told me, "Low turnout is not a change electorate." But such small numbers can also mean opportunity. A scant few thousand votes can change the nameplate on the fifth floor of city hall.

Historically, Erie's mayoral races are decided in the populous and ethnically diverse Fifth Ward. And Devlin has deep roots on the city's east side. Cuneo told me, "Devlin has an advantage in the Fifth Ward but to win she will need organization and money — enough to literally drive voters to the polls."

The 2025 race comes down to the leadership style that Erie voters want in a mayor. Devlin promises action. She told me, "The mayor needs to go to Harrisburg and Washington, D.C. often. Our mayor should meet regularly with business leaders and city council. We need to bring in new businesses and opportunities, which means the mayor needs to go out and advocate. The mayor needs to be Erie's biggest cheerleader."

Schember told me, "I've never enjoyed a job so much. We've had a great seven years. I have a great team. I enjoy knowing the city's 700 employees and getting to know the people of Erie. I want to hear people. I want input from people."

Erie, this is your choice.

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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DEI Is Disappearing—Not by Force, But By Compliance

Avoiding erasure must come with a fight

By: Dr. Jay Breneman, President, Erie School Board

Across the country, school boards and administrators are gutting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs — not because they must, but because they think it will protect them. The truth is, they are dismantling equity initiatives before anyone even demands it, preemptively surrendering to a political assault that will not stop at DEI.

We've seen this before. Not just in schools, not just in policy, but in every historical moment where those in power moved to silence and control through intimidation rather than outright force. The method is always the same: erase the language, frame justice as a threat, make people afraid to speak, punish those who refuse to comply, and let fear do the rest.

And school boards and administrators are already falling in line — sometimes without realizing it.

In Texas, universities recently dismantled DEI offices. In Florida, state mandates are forcing districts to strip equity policies from their charters. But in many other districts (places where no legal requirement exists) leaders are still shutting down DEI — not because they have to, but because they fear they'll be targeted next.

Maybe they're considering cutting diversity initiatives before someone complains or they've already told their staff to "stick to the basics." Maybe they're debating whether it is worth the trouble to fight back at all.

They're telling themselves this is "strategy." That they are just keeping their heads down, that they are protecting their schools, but they're lying to themselves.

This movement isn't looking for minor compliance. It isn't playing fair — it's hunting for reasons to strip funding, gut programs, and force schools into total submission. If school boards and administrators think renaming DEI will make a difference, if they think toning down equity work will keep them off the radar, they haven't been paying attention. They are carrying out the rollback for this administration, removing programs before the order even comes down.

This is how oppression wins — not through laws alone, but through bureaucrats and administrators who convince themselves they are "playing smart" while they quietly hand over everything that makes schools even remotely equitable.

The slow surrender of public education

Let's stop pretending that school boards and administrators weren't already being pressured to erase equity long before this moment.

Where was this urgency for justice before jobs were on the line? Where was this fear when Black, Indigenous, Brown, Asian, Pacific Islander, disabled, and undocumented students were disproportionately suspended, tracked out of AP courses, or denied the same resources as their white peers?

DINA



Dr. Jay Breneman, President of Erie School Board urges school districts, in particular the Erie School District, to refrain from preemptively dismantling DEI programs that serve students, effectively stripping our schools of "equity, history, and truth."

Schools weren't afraid then. They weren't afraid when the disparities were quiet, and the harm was slow.

But now, suddenly, school boards and administrators are scared — not of what their students will lose, but of what *they* might lose if they refuse to comply.

Some districts will say they are just protecting their budgets — but they aren't protecting students, they aren't protecting truth, and in the end, compliance will not protect their funding either — it will only make the next demand come faster.

And let's be clear: this doesn't stop with DEI. The same playbook is being used to erase LGBTQIA+ existence, to strip libraries of books that challenge dominant narratives, and to turn teachers into enforcers of an oppressive lie.

This isn't just about whitewashing history—it's about rewriting it into a weapon.

It's about manufacturing a version of education where oppression never existed, where justice was

never necessary, where inequality is recast as fairness and where those who suffer are told it is their own fault.

Schools won't face the consequences — students will

School boards and administrators think they can deflect blame, that the backlash will be aimed at state lawmakers or national political figures, but they are wrong. Students won't blame the governor's office or some faceless official in Washington. They will blame the people sitting in front of them in school board meetings. They will remember who took the books from their libraries. They will remember who sat quietly while their friends were erased from the curriculum and social activities. They will remember who enforced policies that told them their struggles weren't real. They will remember who nodded along in meetings while their education was stripped to the bone.

And what's worse? This compliance won't save anyone's job, because there is no version of this where

compliance is enough.

Schools can erase every DEI initiative, delete every mention of racial disparities, purge every book that doesn't fit the new worldview — and they will still come for more. Because this isn't about DEI: this is about submission.

This isn't new — it's just escalating

None of this started with the Trump administration; the American public education system was never designed for justice. It has always been an apparatus of racial and class control. Indigenous communities have always known this: their languages, histories, and cultures were stripped from schools long before DEI became a political flashpoint.

The question is not whether DEI will survive — it's whether school leaders will stop dismantling it themselves before the real fight even begins. Because in the end, they will be remembered for one thing: either they erased history, or they refused to let it disappear.

Black communities have always known this: from segregated schools (de facto and de jure) to tracking, to discipline disparities — the system has always been built to exclude and punish them.

Disabled students have always known this: their

existence in classrooms has been treated as an inconvenience, their support systems slashed at the first sign of a budget cut — if even funded at all.

Immigrant, refugee, and undocumented students have always known this: their futures have been debated ad nauseam as if their humanity is up for discussion.

LGBTQIA+ students have always known this: their lives erased, their identities treated as threats.

This moment is not new. What is new is that school boards and administrators are making the same mistake they always do — thinking that silence will protect them.

Resistance is not a statement, it's a strategy

Most people won't care if schools release a statement, because no one needs symbolic gestures.

If district leaders are serious about resisting, here is what that actually looks like:

1. Refusing to enforce policies that erase protections, even at risk to the district.
2. Using budget priorities, policy reviews, and legal protections to insulate students from harm.
3. Ensuring that banned histories, books, and knowledge still reach students — through partnerships, underground networks, or direct defiance.
4. Building a coalition strong enough that when they come for school policies, they cannot come for the people inside the system.

If school leaders aren't doing this, they aren't resisting. They are surrendering. And some will pre-

tend that they "just can't," that their hands are tied, that they have no choice but to comply. That if they resist, their schools will lose funding or their jobs will be at risk.

That might be true.

But what they are really saying is that their comfort, their paychecks, and their professional security are more important than the survival of the most vulnerable students in their districts. At least be honest about it.

The real crisis isn't DEI getting banned, it's school leaders banning it themselves

This isn't just a local fight — it is a national one. School boards and administrators are deciding, right now, whether they will let public education be stripped of equity, history, and truth. But compliance won't save them. It will only accelerate the rollback.

The question is not whether DEI will survive — it's whether school leaders will stop dismantling it themselves before the real fight even begins. Because in the end, they will be remembered for one thing: either they erased history, or they refused to let it disappear.

Jay Breneman has served as the Board President of Erie's Public Schools since 2023. He is an educator and policy professional with expertise in governance and equity. He lives in Erie with his wife and their three school-aged children. Readers can reach him at jaybreneman@gmail.com.

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Past Perfect: Why We Must Preserve, Share Women's Stories

Appreciating women's growth in Erie society

By: Liz Allen

Helen Stone Schluraff ran for something — Erie County Commissioner — and won, 81 years before *She Should Run* launched a campaign to encourage women to seek elective office. She died in 1964 at age 80.

Catherine Sekerak Balog broke the glass ceiling in the business world, if only for a single day, decades before that aspirational phrase became commonplace. Born in 1908, she died in 2001 at age 93.

Marilyn Bernstein Cohen joined two other Erie women to encourage Erie school kids to become more empathetic by widening their circles of friends, half a century before the words “diversity, equity, and inclusion” were embraced (and subsequently reviled). She was 92 when she died in 2018.

Through her poetry, Thasia Lunger, 69, draws on her memories of fearing for her life to offer hope and encouragement to victims of domestic violence and other traumas. Sharing stories helps the healing process, she said. “I call it taking out the garbage.”

I don't know if any of the three deceased women crossed paths; perhaps they ate on occasion in the Boston Store dining room, where Catherine Balog worked for 35 years. Yet as we celebrate Women's History Month, their stories are bound together in my imagination because these women made break-

throughs — in politics, in the workplace, in public service, and in the creative world.

For some of these stories, I have only scant details. But to learn about Helen, I read the extensive research on the women's suffrage movement in Erie compiled by Lori Morse-Dolan, a member of the National Collaborative for Women's History Sites, and Linda Bolla, an independent historian.

In 2020, their research provided valuable information for Erie's celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment. Congress passed the amendment giving women the right to vote in 1919; it was ratified in 1920.

The work of Morse-Dolan and Bolla also led to the placement of a historic marker on Sassafras Street to honor Augusta Brown Fleming, president of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Equal Franchise Association (also known as the Equal Suffrage Association) and founding president of the League of Women Voters in Erie.

It is still up for debate whether Helen Stone Schluraff considered herself a suffragette — Morse-Dolan and Bolla continue to research her story. But there is no doubt that after women got the right to vote, Helen made sure that women's voices were heard, including her own, as she became a leader in the Erie County Republican Party.

“Schluraff felt that women should have a voice in government. Women using their vote was a priority for Helen. She believed in the need to educate the newly franchised citizens on their government and issues. She viewed the vote as a true element of power and felt it should be used wisely,” Morse-Dolan and Bolla have written in their proposal to seek a historic marker for Schluraff at a site to be determined.

Helen was resilient and indefatigable, raising two children as a single mother after her divorce, owning a flower business, organizing weekly lunches for businesswomen, co-founding the Erie League of Women Voters, becoming a charter member of the Zonta Club and, in 1931, being elected as the first female County Commissioner in Erie County and in Pennsylvania.

Helen served as commissioner for three terms, earning a reputation as a strong fiscal conservative and not raising taxes, while also supporting human services, such as construction of the Erie County Tuberculosis Hospital, a lifesaver before TB vaccinations were developed.

A grandmother's legacy

Cathryn Griffith, known as Katie Corboy when she lived in Erie, is Helen's granddaughter. She adds rich details to Helen's life in her exquisite family memoir, *Weaving Hopes and Prayers: The Richly Textured Story of Five Generations of Women*. There is a limited-edition boxed version of her book in the rare books collection at Blasco Library's Heritage Room,



This marker on the west side of Sassafras Street honors Augusta Brown Fleming, a prominent Erie County suffragette. Her home, around the corner at 210 W. Eighth St., served as the headquarters for Erie's suffragette parade on July 8, 1913, part of Erie's weeklong celebration of Oliver Hazard Perry. News coverage described the parade as a “spectacular pageant,” followed by passionate speeches by advocates for women's rights on the courthouse steps.

another copy in the reference section of the Heritage Room, and also a circulating copy at Blasco.

Now 87 and living in Massachusetts, Cathryn is the daughter of the late Jim and Dorothy Corboy, who met as journalists at the Erie Dispatch. As a college student, Dorothy kept a diary during a two-month trip to Europe, where she was offered, but declined, a job at the International Herald Tribune in Paris, returning to Erie instead.

In keeping a diary, Dorothy followed a tradition begun by her grandmother, Margaret Love Stone, and her mother, Helen Stone Schluraff. During a time of mourning, Cathryn drew upon those family diaries and journals to create her handmade book.

“My husband, my mother, and I all had cancer the same year,” she said. Cathryn survived cervical cancer but her mother, Dorothy, died when Cathryn's daughter was two; then Cathryn's husband Jim died. “The entire universe had changed for me. I was no longer able to bear a child. There was no longer anyone older and wiser in my little world,” she writes in her book. “Memories sustained me ... Photographs and stories guided me in giving my daughter a sense of her personal history.”

Her memoir isn't just a look back; it's a keepsake for her daughter, Sarah Gallowhur Griffith, and for her granddaughter, Vivienne Stone Lemieux, Sarah's daughter.

“I've always greatly admired my grandmother, Hel-



Helen Stone Schluraff, a small-business owner, won election as the first female county commissioner in Erie County and in Pennsylvania in 1931, 11 years after women got the right to vote with ratification of the 19th Amendment.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL HIGHLIGHT



Connecting Students to Their Future: Erie High's Job Fair

At Erie High, a United Way Community School, preparing students for life after graduation isn't just about textbooks—it's about real opportunities. Thanks to the Community School Model, Erie High students had the chance to connect with local employers, explore career paths, and take the first step toward their future at the recent Job Fair.

Over 400 students. More than 20 businesses. Endless opportunities.



en Stone Schluraff, and I feel very fortunate that I knew her well before she died. She was honest, focused, and very hard-working," Cathryn recalled. Even after her grandmother left her elected role as a county commissioner, she stayed on top of county politics and was active in the local Republican party.

"I remember at least once, on election night, going with her to the county courthouse," she said. Her grandmother kept tabs that night on "How did Ward 2 go and how did Ward 5 go," so she could calculate whether her favored candidate would win. "I was so impressed she could talk that kind of language," Cathryn said.

Cathryn is also the author of *Havana Revisited: An Architectural Heritage* and has another family history in the works, based on the journals of her great-grandmother, Margaret "Maggie" Love Stone. You can learn more about Cathryn at cathryngriffith.com.

I like to keep in mind her observation that Erie County has been home to "a lot of really intelligent, caring, sensitive women ... with depth, with character, and it's important that their voices be heard."

A day to be in charge

I wish I had the chance to hear Catherine Balog's voice before she died in 2001. In 1996, she sent a letter to the Erie Times-News features department, where I was managing editor, after we asked readers to share memories of the Boston Store.

Catherine enclosed four menus from the Boston Store's Tower Dining Room, where she began working in the late 1930s. From these menus, I learned that coffee cost 10 cents in 1943, vegetable soup with saltines cost 15 cents in 1956, a tuna fish sandwich with salad, tea, or coffee cost 45 cents in 1957, and a lobster salad went for \$1.05 in 1963. Old menus, in addition to making you hungry, can also give you a glimpse into Erie history.

In her letter, Catherine enclosed a March 1970 story from the Erie Daily Times Women's Section reporting that Catherine had been named president of the Boston Store for one day — the annual Women's Day, on March 2.

I read that story when I was a college freshman, incensed that women could only be trusted to run the Boston Store one day a year.

Older and wiser now, I understand that change often comes in small steps.

In the newspaper story, Catherine talked about being inspired by the motto from Corry High School: "Enter to learn. Depart to serve."

She served customers at the Boston Store for a long time, starting in the dining room as a checker, then becoming a cook, waitress, hostess, and assistant manager before moving to work in the receiving department.

I enjoyed reading that "her good spirits are always on hand and she is quick to offer help to anyone in need."

Kids make new friends

I picture those good spirits also surrounding Marilyn Cohen, Myra Carathers, and Hannah Smith, who volunteered to teach the Green Circle program at Edison Elementary School in 1972, under the direction of coordinator Elaine Knorr, a member of the American Association of University Women.

Erie Daily Times Managing Editor Len Kholos wrote in a column about the Green Circle program on Feb. 2, 1972, "Children were exposed to the radical concept of treating people equally regardless of their size, color, physical condition, wealth, religion, country of origin, or even if they live in those countries," making clear that his use of the word "radical" was satirical, as he slammed a "local hate group's diatribe" that the fourth-graders participating in the Green Circle program were "being brainwashed and estranged from their reliance on God, family, and country by 'certified governmental child molesters.'"

I was disturbed to see that language employed today to ban books and to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion programs was also banded about in Erie in the 1970s.

Kholos' column, which I found in a file at Blasco's Heritage Room, made me wish I could learn more about the Green Circle program. The only reference I could find online is from the National Archives, which noted that the Green Circle Program "was conceived in 1957 by Gladys Rawlins, a Black social worker for the Race Relations Committee of The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). ... The program focuses on helping people develop an appreciation and understanding of diversity while developing self-worth."

I worry about how much longer this archived material will be available, now that President Trump has fired the National Archivist and the deputy National Archivist is retiring.

That upsetting news, among other developments, sparked my quest to find some interesting nuggets about Erie women's history, so that information isn't erased, downplayed, or rewritten.

Poetry helps healing

Fortunately, we can be assured that women will continue to write and speak about their lived experiences, as poet Thasia Anne Lunger has been doing for many years.

"I always say that poetry saved my life," said Lunger, who has a degree in social work and began her career working with teens aging out of foster care. "Those kids have lived through a lot of garbage that no kid should see," Lunger said.

Married as a teenager, Lunger left her husband twice after violent episodes but went back, before she realized that he would likely follow through on his threats to shoot and kill her, the kids, her mother, their pets, and "anything I cared about."

She is the founder of the Women of Word poetry program, the author of six books of poetry and is working on her eighth novel. You can learn more about her work and upcoming poetry events by visiting her Facebook page at Thasia Anne Lunger.

Men also participate in her poetry events. "Male poets have a lot of important things to say, too," Thasia said.

Author Cathryn Griffin acknowledges men's roles in researching personal histories. Her family's "early story is a story of men, because the genealogical records are based on the history of the family name. Later, it becomes a woman's story. Beginning in the 1860s, women gathered and recorded family information, which has been added to and passed on from mother to daughter."

And now, to Erie Reader readers.

Liz Allen was thrilled to learn that her late aunt, Anne Allen, wrote an Erie Daily Times story, "Silhouette of Success," about Helen Stone Schluraff, which is included in Cathryn Griffith's family memoir. You can reach Liz at lizerie@aol.com.



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Herb and Honey Bakery's New Beginning

A history of place and an eye on the future, with pastries

By: Erin Phillips

What makes a local business worth supporting? Is it the quality of the products? Is it the character of the business owner? Is it the convenience or significance of their location? In the case of Herb and Honey Bakery and owner Jessica Schultz (40 Under 40 Class of 2023), all three get a resounding YES.

If you haven't yet heard the buzz, local bakery Herb and Honey, which, for the past four years, has been a regular presence in the baked goods section of Urbaniak Brothers Quality Meats, has opened up a new location in the West Bayfront area at 516 Cherry St. They've taken up residence in a building that has been a part of the fabric of the neighborhood for over 115 years and, with the work of benefactor Thomas B. Hagen, the vision and execution of Kidder (architects) and Jefferys (construction), and the drive and success of Jessica's bakery — the building will move into the future as a place of community nourishment, local economic growth, ethical business and agricultural practices, and honestly, the most perfect pastries available in the tri-state area.

The building which was, up until recently, known as Sophia's Tavern was constructed in 1908 and initially served the neighborhood as a grocery store — specifically Scarlett's

Community Store and was operated as such through the mid-1930s when the building settled into its bones as a bakery. Steinbarth's Bakery, owned by Otto Steinbarth, opened in the space in 1936. Steinbarth was a purveyor of breads, rolls, cakes, pies, and French pastries. In an Erie Times News article from 1936, it was noted that "the building has all been redecorated and rebuilt enabling daylight and sunshine to penetrate all corners. The cleanliness of the bakery and the manner in which all products are baked will meet with satisfaction and approval of all who purchase at the bakery."

Another local baker, Ludwig (who went by Louis during World War II) Zehe, expanded his bakery empire to this building, purchasing it from the Steinbarths in 1943. Zehe's flagship location occupied 23 W. Seventh St., next to the Boston Store, before the outfit moved to a larger facility at 21 W. Eighth St., eventually expanding to satellite locations throughout the city and county. Mr. Zehe was "especially skilled in pastry work, having completed a course in Vienna, and another at Siebel Institute of Baking in Chicago," states an Erie Times News interview from 1938.

Current owner Jessica Schultz comments on the connection to this building's history as a bakery: "I feel pretty honored to be next in the line. The feel of a place is very important and it is



The building that now houses Herb and Honey bakery has a long-standing history in the neighborhood. Thanks to Historic Erie Restoration, it has been updated, repaired, expanded, and outfitted specifically for the needs of their new tenant.

a very rooted, stable, and comforting place to be. It would be nice to think that the building likes to be a bakery."

In 1952, the Zehe family sold the property to Sophia Sliwinski Kotoski and her husband John, who opened up the bar known as Sophia's Tavern. Sophia's served neighbors and visitors for 42 years in this location and in 1994, it continued on with the same name but under the ownership of Lester Holowienko and his wife Christine. The Holowienkos kept it going until it eventually closed in 2019 — totaling 67 years of business as a familiar watering hole for the neighborhood.

Schultz continues, "There are so many people who have stories of this place, or stories that are handed down — like someone's grandfather who always occupied a certain seat at the bar. I'm working on building a community scrapbook where those memories and connections to the building can be recorded and kept here. So many people have a connection to this place and I'm trying to find a way to honor and preserve that."

So how did Herb and Honey Bakery come to occupy this historic space? That story begins with the work of Tom Hagen, architect Jeff Kidder, and their goal to help preserve, restore, and find new uses for the historic buildings of Erie. The group (in this

case Historic Erie Restoration, but also, with other projects, as the Historic Erie Preservation Trust) purchased the building in 2022 mainly because of its proximity to their other properties along Millionaire's Row, but without a tenant or use for the building in mind.

Kidder notes, "We bought it not knowing exactly what to do with it and without having an immediate use for it." He continues, "At some point, Anna Frantz (former director of the nonprofit neighborhood group Our West Bayfront) called me about Jessica, told me about her bakery, and mentioned she was possibly looking to relocate to the West Bayfront." Current neighborhood outreach manager of Our West Bayfront Starla Cochenour comments on this connection: "We're so excited to welcome Herb and Honey to the West Bayfront — we're fortunate to have another small business here that not only serves incredible treats but also strengthens the sense of connection that makes our community so special."

After a zany Tuesday afternoon in August of 2023 (one that involved both power and gas outages, the slapdash transportation of delicate, unbaked pastry dough, and multiple races across town), Schultz was able to meet with Kidder and Hagen, give them a taste of her baked goods, discuss the



Owner of Herb and Honey Bakery Jessica Schultz (left) and architect Jeff Kidder worked closely together to create a functional, beautiful space that honors the history of the building.

opportunity, figure out what specifics she would require, and then got to work. Kidder reflects on the unique situation of working with Mr. Hagen, “The amount of rent has nothing to do with how much money was put into the building. It’s an investment, but it doesn’t have to make sense like it does for everyone else. We were able to do something that cost a lot more than the rent covers and that’s okay. That’s

design choice, “I wanted that window because I wanted people to be reminded of the human aspect of baking and the actual people making their food.”

That human aspect of food, one could say, informs many of the choices Schultz has made and continues to make about her work and the social impact of the food she makes. It all started, as so many great food stories do, with a grandmother and a memo-

“The feel of a place is very important and it is a very rooted, stable, and comforting place to be. It would be nice to think that the building likes to be a bakery.” — Herb and Honey owner Jessica Schultz on her new location at 516 Cherry St.

the mission — we want to help people in that way. We can do above and beyond what’s normal for a renovation project and still make it affordable for the tenant.”

And that renovation project definitely goes well beyond “normal.” The building has been restored, head-to-toe, and expanded specifically to suit the needs of the bakery — with a small seating area, a spot for merchandise and display, all featuring historically accurate tile and woodwork. The exterior has been expanded to include outdoor seating and room for gardens in the spring. The kitchen is pristine, modern, and on-display — a large picture window connects the kitchen with the commercial side of the bakery. Schultz comments on this

ry. Schultz reflects on how she first became interested in baking, “Before the kindergarten bus arrived, my grandma and I used to bake pies together with fresh, local fruit and rhubarb she grew behind her garage.” The baking bug followed her through high school, where she would bake and sell muffins, and into college.

After college, Schultz apprenticed on organic farms in Montana and developed her appreciation for quality produce. “I enjoy farming as much as I enjoy making food and it’s because in my mind it’s one in the same thing. You can control the quality, the flavor, the variety — and you can have just as much of a nostalgic connection to a certain variety that you’re growing as you can to the recipe that you’re

CONTRIBUTED BY KEN NARACCI



Edmund Kotoski, husband of the eponymous Sophia, serves patrons at the bar at Sophia’s Tavern. The building that now houses Herb and Honey bakery was home to a myriad of businesses throughout its history — but the Kotoskis’ run at Sophia’s was the longest, serving the neighborhood from 1952 to 1994.

using.” She continues, “Certain things, like rhubarb, I have a really strong connection to because my grandma would grow that and bake with that. That’s the reason why I still partner with local farmers — I want to know their growing process and want to support them. I’m not going there asking what’s the cheapest, I’m going there asking what’s their best.”

And while her menu has regular staple items like sourdough breads, rolls and pretzels, pastries, bear claws, croissants (both savory and sweet), and cookies — she offers regular specials featuring seasonal produce (did someone mention rhubarb?), holiday themes (like my personal favorite, Italian cream-stuffed sweet rolls called Maritozzi, served around Valentine’s Day), or locally relevant products (like Federal Hill turkey-stuffed pretzel bites).

But for Schultz, it’s not just about cranking out as many baked goods as possible, it’s about building and supporting community and bolstering food security within that community. “With all this recent uncertainty, I know that a resilient community will be built around a resilient food system,” she posits. Schultz is committed to continue working with local farmers and providers to get as many of her ingredients from as close to home as possible. She’s also working to expand the scope of the business by offering classes, informational sessions, and community action groups.

In the meantime, business is booming and Schultz is currently supporting two full-time employees and four part-timers. She’s beyond grateful for the community’s support — specifically mentioning her gratitude to the City of Erie and their revolving loan fund: “I was able to get a low-interest loan that originated from American Rescue Plan funds to purchase all my equipment. As I repay my loan, the money is then lent back out to other small businesses.”

Building community around high quality food, personal and architectural history, and on the strong character of a business owner committed to doing right by her neighbors — all of these elements have come together to create a place that honors history and is working in the right direction to build a sound (and delicious) future.

Herb and Honey Bakery is located at 516 Cherry St. They will be celebrating their Grand Opening on Thursday, March 20 at 8 a.m. They will be offering free sourdough starter, live art, and the opportunity to contribute memories to that aforementioned community scrapbook. Herb and Honey’s regular hours are Thursday through Sunday from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Visit herbandhoneybakery.com to learn more.

When not taking a leisurely neighborhood stroll to the inspiringly yummy Herb and Honey (and subsequently devouring those buttery, flaky layers), Erin Phillips can be found at erin@eriereader.com

CONTRIBUTED BY KEN NARACCI



This historic photo of Sophia’s Tavern at 516 Cherry St. shows a team of Budweiser Clydesdale horses making a national tour to market the beer. They made a local stop in Erie in the late 1950s.

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Can't Miss Dishes 2025

Seven craveable meals from a myriad of Erie establishments

By: Erin Phillips

Food is something that a place can build an identity around — in Erie there are local haunts that have stood the test of time, hosting generations of Erieites and creating lasting food memories for countless citizens (and probably some visitors, too). There is the Erie-centric fare — pepperoni balls, ox roast, Greek dogs, and blue moon ice cream, to name a few — that have become our culinary calling card.

How does a food become the stuff of legend? That question is inherent in our annual Can't Miss Dishes feature — to call the public's attention to locally made taste sensations that we (the writers and editors at the Erie Reader) feel should be on your radar. Something you might have overlooked or a place you've never considered — but one that has something so good, craveable, and unique, we feel compelled to mention them in print. Some, we hope, might become legends.

So here's this year's list. We take you from soup to nuts, as it were — breakfast, lunch, dinner, and dessert. We've got vegan and vegetarian options; we've got easy weeknight options; we've got fancy, celebratory richness alongside hearty, down-to-earth meals. Something for every budget and taste. We hope you enjoy!

What: Spinach Benny

Where: Avanti's, 1662 W. 8th St

Vibe: Light while still being decadent

On the Menu as: Spinach Benedict

Price: \$12 (although with the whole egg situation, maybe temporarily more)

Hot Tip: Our editors are split on hash browns vs. home fries, but this writer definitely prefers the crispy, cubed latter.



It's a little known fact that once a month, our small crew of editors at the Erie Reader meet up for breakfast at Avanti's. We have our favorite table, we have our favorite server (Alisa, we love you), we keep the coffee coming, and at least two of us invariably order the Spinach Benedict. Lighter and less heavy than a traditional, meat-laden benedict, the gently sautéed spinach and fresh tomato make the runny yolk and buttery hollandaise feel a little less intense but still totally indulgent.

What: The GOAT Italian Combo Sub

Where: 6Pack House of Beer, 847 Pittsburgh Ave.

Vibe: Audibly "mmmmmm-ing" with each bite

On the Menu As: Subs: Combo

Price: \$8.50 (half), \$17.00 (whole)

Hot Tip: Stop in on a Saturday night and tell the Earth Angel serving you that I sent you.



Listen. The best Italian combo sub you're ever going to have in Erie (arguably anywhere) is tucked away in a lil' strip mall beer store. This is not conjecture, this is fact. Made on a buttered, perfectly toasted, big ass loaf of locally made Majestic Baking Co. sourdough Italian bread that makes it impossible to be soggy, pressed with fresh sliced meats and cheeses piled high, and just the right amount of Italian vinaigrette — it is less a sub and more a transcendent experience. Pair it with a Lavery Brewing Company/Happy Mug collab Ulster Stout and you'll be feeling totally satisfied while supporting four local businesses in one go.

What: Ricotta Meatballs

Where: Roma's Italian Kitchen, 2933 W. 12th St.

Vibe: Upscale version of grandma's Sunday meatballs

On the Menu As: Nonna's Famous Meatballs

Price: \$14

Hot Tip: If you're feeling more a vegetarian situation,



the eggplant parm should not be missed.

Roma's Italian Kitchen, the latest restaurant on the Mediterranean scene in Erie, features a dining room design with modern, Chihuly-esque glass light fix-

tures alongside rustic barnwood tables. And the menu matches that vibe — simultaneously rustic and refined. The ricotta meatballs, specifically, are that old school, Sunday-dinner-at-Grandma's-house nostalgia but elevated — served on a bed of whipped ricotta, herbs, and olive oil. Drag a piece of the meatball through the creamy, fresh cheese and it creates a sauce all its own. Order it with a side of fried zucchini (sliced thin, in a light tempura-like batter, with a squeeze of lemon) and you've got yourself a meal worthy of Nonna's praise.

This next dish was something our Contributing Editor Nick Warren felt our readers simply couldn't miss. Take it away, Nick!

What: Vegan Philly

Where: Philly on the Rocks, 401 W. 18th St.

Vibe: Pennsylvania corner rock 'n' roll bar realness

On the Menu As: Philly Steaks

Price: \$7.25 (Small), \$11.99 (Large)



Hot Tip: Pair it with a basket of their Phreaky Phries

You would think that something called a *cheesesteak* wouldn't be a very good vegan option, but in this case, you'd be very wrong. Chances are, if you're familiar with Philly on the Rocks it's probably because you're a fan of live, original music. This unassuming corner bar is also home to what has to be Erie's best take on the iconic Philly cheese steak. A labor of love from owner and cook Sean McElhinney, each sandwich is served on an authentic Amarosa roll from Philadelphia. Toppings can include fried onions, raw onions, mushrooms, banana peppers, and bacon, with six choices of cheese including Whiz. The Vegan Philly in particular has taken a gooey piece of my heart. The lightness of the plant based crumble is the perfect thing to fuel you without slowing you down if you're seeing (or playing) a show and downing a couple of drinks. Rock 'n' roll is hard work.

What: Mixed Kabob Platter

Where: Shish Kabob, 1202 French St.

Vibe: Smoky charry grilled goodness for dayzzzz

On the Menu As: Mixed Grills

Price: \$17.00

Hot Tip: Order with a side of hummus and pitas — then pile all the things into a wrap.

As I mentioned in the vibe portion above, not only is

FEATURE

ERIN PHILLIPS



this food incredibly tasty, fresh, authentic, and flavorful — it also lasts for days. The proprietors of Shish Kabob Restaurant want to feed you well and are so generous with their portions that a single order of Mixed Grills kabobs will feed you for *at least* two meals. Skewered and grilled ground chicken and beef are served atop a literal hotel pan full of aromatic yellow rice alongside (my favorite part) the grilled veg: tomatoes, zucchini, and onions, and the herbiest salad imaginable. You'll be looking forward to tomorrow's lunch (and maybe dinner)!

What: Steak with Lobster Sauce

Where: The Boardroom Dining and Spirits, 4353 W. Ridge Rd.

Vibe: The place for steaks in Erie

On the Menu As: 12 oz. Angus Reserve New York Strip

Price: \$46

Hot Tip: Word on the street is that the burger is also incredible — you be the judge.

If you haven't made it to the Boardroom yet, let this

be your word-of-mouth suggestion to give it a try for your next celebratory meal. Our co-editor-in-chief Adam Welsh reports that this steak is "indeed bomb." Perfectly cooked, super juicy, and flavorful — the char-broiled prime steak is blanketed in a luxurious Gold Coast shrimp and lobster cream sauce that rivals or

ADAM WELSH



bests other, more pricey options. Reservations are encouraged, as during winter months the indoor seating is limited. Look forward to patio seating in the warmer months, where you can enjoy this indulgent, unforgettable meal al fresco.

What: Sponge Candy Affogato

Where: Romolo Chocolates, 1525 W. 8th St.

Vibe: Like being at an Italian cafe

On the Menu As: Affogato

Price: \$8.99 (single scoop)

Hot Tip: You can choose your ice cream flavor — this would be equally great with a variety involving pista-

chio, chocolate, or caramel.

As if Romolo ice cream wasn't perfection enough (and it is — this writer particularly recommends their "peanut butter salted caramel" variety) with its fresh, homemade, intensely creamy, velvety mouthfeel, studded with various Romolo cakes, candies, nuts, and cookies. Their affogato (which is on a supplementary menu atop the ice cream freezer) takes that perfection to a whole new level. Artfully pulled espresso shots, made in the Italian tradition on their imported Vittoria Arduino Venus machine, with its thick layer of crema, is poured atop a scoop of the aforementioned perfect ice cream (in our case, we chose their sponge candy flavor), and topped with fresh, lightly sweetened whipped cream and homemade fudge sauce. It is the balance of sweet and bitter with hot and cold, that makes this "drowned" dessert one that shouldn't be missed.

JESSICA HUNTER



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Make a Run for the Border: Erie's Evolving Taco Scene

There's a taco for everyone in the Gem City

By: Jonathan Burdick

I didn't eat a taco until I was 12 years old. I'm not proud. In my defense though, there weren't too many places to get tacos where I was growing up in rural Pennsylvania. Most restaurants were still pretty salt-and-pepper and while I'm sure there were some Taco Tuesdays around, beyond the occasional taco salad at a family gathering or whatever that taco pizza was served for school lunches, my taco exposure was minimal.

Around the sixth grade, my older brother's friend introduced me to spicy chicken wings from a local bowling alley. He warned me that the sauce would hurt (and it *did*), but somehow the pain wasn't bad. This introduction to one of the five basic tastes also broadened what I was willing to eat.

Shortly after, my love of tacos was ignited, perhaps unsurprisingly, at Taco Bell. Having rented *Demolition Man* on VHS an embarrassing amount of times — a sci-fi action flick set in a future where Taco Bell satirically remains as the only chain restaurant following the Restaurant Wars — this was an easy sell for my first taco. They had also just launched their Fire Sauce packets and, with my taste buds acclimating to heat, I loaded each of my tacos with three packets each... *four* if I was feeling dangerous. Those Taco Bell trips to nearby Edinboro were soon a weekly occurrence. In the eighth grade, my friends and I even made a documentary titled *A History of Taco Bell* for our World History class. The teacher gave us a C-plus. They were probably being generous.

In high school, as we began driving and exploring places outside of our small town such as Erie, we soon discovered a whole culinary world previously unknown to us. Our increasingly adventurous taste buds finally had a chance to expand. One of the very first places that we discovered on our own was El Canelo Mexican Restaurant on Peach Street. This was the first place to teach me that tacos could actually have flavor *without* smothering them with three or four packets of hot sauce.

Of course, I was very late to the taco enthusiast party. Tacos have a long and rich history, both in Mexico and the United States. In their more modern iteration, the origins are not entirely

agreed upon. Food historian Jeffrey M. Pilcher is among those who believe that tacos originated with Mexican silver miners during the 1700s. As he described in *Smithsonian Magazine*, the earliest written reference of tacos he's ever found comes from Mexico nearly a century later. These were called *tacos de minero*: *miner's* tacos. In the United States, he believes, the earliest use of the word "taco" in print was 1905.

Many parts of the United States today — California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado — were Mexican territory before the Mexican-American War ended in 1848. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo transferred over half of Mexico's territory to the United States, leaving Mexican citizens within these territories one year to make a choice: stay, in which they'd become American citizens, or to take their belongings and retreat south of the newly redrawn border. The number of families who stayed is not clear, but what *is* clear is that the culinary influences of these Mexican American families dominated within these states as Southwest cuisine continuously evolved and fused over the following century.

Tacos were already a working-class staple in Mexico, but their popularity spread a bit slower stateside. In 1947, for instance, the citrus-centric National Orange Show Fair in San Bernardino, California operated its first taco stand on its fairgrounds. Initially, organizers were skeptical of the request. Who wants to walk around holding a *taco*? As it turned out, a lot of people did. In that first year, the taco stand made over \$4,000 — nearly \$60,000 today adjusted for inflation.

Still, tacos were not an overnight sensation outside of the Southwest or Mexican American communities. A 1960 Pittsburgh Press report discussing the growing popularity of Mexican food mentioned that there were no Mexican restaurants within the city. Many readers didn't even seem to know what a *taco* was, leaving reporters the task of explaining them.

"The taco is a sort of sandwich," one Spokane, Washington newspaper said in 1964. "You take a pancake-like tortilla and make a kind of envelope of it. Fill it with meat, lettuce and hot sauce."

It was common throughout the 1960s



These Mexican Street Tacos from El Amigo (winner of 2024 Best of Erie's Best Mexican Restaurant and Best Taco) featuring their asada (lime marinated beef) come a la carte in singles, or as a dinner with three, on freshly made tortillas. They're a great stalwart of the Erie taco scene.

for tacos to be called "Mexican sandwiches." They were regularly compared to hot dogs and, perhaps rather sacrilegiously, at least once referred to as "a sloppy joe in a tortilla."

"What the pizza and grinder stand is to New England, the taco stand represents on the West Coast," a Connecticut newspaper published. A newspaper in Idaho described a taco as "a tasty morsel with a paper-thin crisp, corn 'pancake' folded around a mixture of chili and beans." It was "easy eating" and "wonderful for munching while reading or watching TV." They suggested replacing ground beef with diced hot dogs for a more "Americanized" version.

After President Richard Nixon and his wife visited a Mexican restaurant in 1970 for their anniversary, a UPI report warned curious readers not to underestimate the spiciness: "A word to the wise: on your first experiment with eating a taco, at home or out, treat the hot sauce with utmost respect. An overdose makes you feel as if you have swallowed a red hot poker."

In Erie, the Lawrence Hotel opened the Fiesta Lounge in October 1960, hosted by maitre d'hotel Ruben Topete. They offered the first advertised tacos in Erie along with enchiladas, tamales, and tequila. Three years later, Tico's at 1018 Parade St. became the second to advertise tacos. Within a few years, local grocery stores were selling frozen "patio beef tacos" in packages of six for easy home cooking.

A 1964 article in the Erie Daily Times discussing Cinco de Mayo noted that roughly 80 percent of Erieites had never tried a "tasty and tempting" taco. By the 1980s, tacos seemed to be nearly everywhere in Erie, although primarily at non-Mexican owned bars and restaurants. This included the city's first Taco Bell on Peach Street. These bars and restaurants advertised Taco Tuesdays and Taco Thursdays. Rum Runners ran a 25-cent Taco Friday. One bar offered free tacos during happy hour. Even the schools were getting in on the taco craze. In 1989, when McDowell High School's head cook Kay Mullen added chili powder to ground beef for the school's taco day, it actually made local news for becoming an instant student and staff favorite.

When El Canelo opened its first Erie location on West 12th Street in 2001, owner Jose Montes said it was specifically because he viewed "the Erie area as lacking in real Mexican cuisine" and, he stressed, the chain tacos were *not* his competition. The food, as local food critic Floyd Lawrence wrote, "both looks and tastes more like what you might imagine Mexican food to be than most of the items available at, say, Taco Bell" but also managed to "appeal to the broadest possible spectrum of American tastes."

"Our food is completely different [than Chi-Chi's and Taco Bell]," Montes told the Erie Times-News. "All my people are Mexican. All the cooks, waiters, every-

body.” By 2003, he and his family had opened their second location on Peach Street in an old Pizza Hut followed by their Harborcreek location a year later. Over the following two decades, well over a dozen Mexican restaurants have opened throughout the city and region offering up their own taco interpretations.

In recent years in the culinary world, there has been a lot of chatter about *authenticity* in relation to tacos. Like many beloved foods though, what one views as an “authentic” taco varies greatly from Southern California to the many border cities and towns to regionally within Mexico itself. In his book *Tacos: Recipes and Provocations*, Chef Alex Stupak argues that authenticity is not “fixed and rigid” and Mexican cuisine is a complex “kaleidoscopic blend of indigenous Mesoamerican crops and traditions with the fruits of Spanish colonization.”

“Talking about tacos gives us a chance to talk about cultural exchange, about idea appropriation, and about the way we value — or undervalue — ethnic cuisines,” he believes, adding that Mexican food deserves the same respect that French cuisine often receives.

José R. Ralat, taco editor for *Texas Monthly*, deliberately avoids using the word “authentic” when writing about Mexican food and tacos. In his book

American Tacos: A History and Guide, he writes about the vast variety of tacos both in Mexico and the United States.

“To put it simply, the evolution of American tacos, like all tacos and beloved dishes, is fueled by regional population shifts, ingredient market availability, and culinary adaptation,” Ralat explains. His book covers the usuals, but also Jewish-style tacos, Korean (or K-Mex) tacos, southern Sur-Mex tacos, Alta California tacos, breakfast tacos, fried tacos, barbecue tacos, puffy tacos, chef-driven tacos, and the growing popularity of birria, a style of taco originating in the Mexican state of Jalisco which traditionally utilizes goat meat. With all of his writing about tacos then, what has Ralat learned?

“I’ve learned that tacos are a gift to be appreciated and enjoyed with friends and strangers,” he writes. “No other food in America brings people together like tacos.”

Indeed, tacos can tantalize all of your taste buds at once and the balance of flavors — sweet, sour, salty, savory, and bitter — can and *should* vary from taco to taco and place to place, each with their own unique flavor profile.

The Erie taco scene is no exception. Numerous restaurants across Erie have their own distinct tacos. Eat tacos at a different place every night for a week and, besides being a very happy person,

you’ll likely have seven very different experiences.

A downtown favorite spot is El Amigo Mexican Grill, operating out of the old Modern Tool building since 2016. Their street tacos, topped simply with onions and cilantro, can be ordered as singles or in threes with freshly made tortillas. Meat choices include asada (lime-marinated beef), al pastor (spit-grilled pork), chorizo (pork sausage), carnitas (slow-cooked pork), and chicken. They also have your staple ground beef tacos

reopening of Enrique’s Southeast Mexico Taqueria and Tortilleria, which uses owner Enrique Garcia Frias’ mother’s recipes, after their building suffered fire damage in 2024. And, if you’re lucky, you can catch Julius, operated by former Latino’s Restaurant owner Julio Reyes, when they offer up their delicious Mexico City-inspired tacos on their revolving menu.

Plenty of other restaurants, bars, and food trucks have put their unique spins on tacos too. There’s the beloved

In recent years in the culinary world, there has been a lot of chatter about authenticity in relation to tacos. Like many beloved foods though, what one views as an “authentic” taco varies greatly from Southern California to the many border cities and towns to regionally within Mexico itself.

with cheese and lettuce as well as birria.

Amigo Taqueria & Botanas in the Millcreek Square describes their recipes as being from their home of Guanajuato, Mexico, northwest of Mexico City. They offer the same proteins as El Amigo with the addition of shrimp and fish tacos, all at comparable prices. Then there is Francisco’s Mexican Taqueria which opened in the summer of 2024 on Broad Street and offers all of the previously mentioned proteins on top of two more unique choices: tacos de cabeza (cow’s head) and tripas (gut).

Across town at Los Primos Mexican Store & Taqueria on West 26th Street, you can snag some groceries, fresh fruits, and vegetables while picking up some succulent tacos including all of the previously mentioned options *plus* lengua (beef tongue) tacos. Their condiment buffet is also a sight to see. Two miles east is Casa Café, opened in 2023 by the El Amigo owners, which has plenty of unique offerings including breakfast tacos with chorizo and egg.

Gas station tacos may not be as marketable as *street* tacos, sure, but Lucky’s Mexican Food, locally owned and operated inside the Speed Check at 18th and Parade, has gained quite the loyal following, myself included. For others, the holy grail of local tacos operates seasonally out of a food truck on Poplar Street: El Chona Movil. Trust me when I say that they are worth the trip and navigating the loyal crowd.

Many are eagerly waiting for the city

Atacolyse Food Truck, which slings gourmet tacos around town filled with ingredients such as slow-smoked brisket, swordfish, and jackfruit and with names such as Tyler’s Tummy Tickler, Irish Shenanigans, Miss Swan, and the Karen.

Lavery Brewery’s brewpub has been serving up their own distinct tacos for years too, including more vegetarian options made with tofu and potatoes, while Taco Distro at the entrance of Presque Isle State Park (from those genius gastronomical minds behind Federal Hill Smokehouse) have been offering up tacos with their trademark pickled onions for the past few years. Another recent addition to the local taco game is Bro Man’s Birria N’ Burger Joint with tacos masterminded by sandwich and burger artist Steve Stanbro who adds quesabirria (braised beef with melty cheese), jerk, and buffalo chicken tacos to the local taco rotation, as well as a vegan option.

Needless to say, there truly is a taco for everyone in Erie and the city’s Mexican community has contributed significantly to our local eats scene in recent decades. So, maybe it’s time to text that friend you haven’t reached out to in a while and say, “Hey, how about some tacos?” The only challenge after that will be deciding where to go.

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



This 1979 depiction of Americanized tacos shows our country’s slow acclimation to the food Mexicans have been enjoying since the 1700s. And while they became popular much earlier in southwestern states, it wasn’t until the 1960s that tacos began to gain a foothold in the rest of the U.S.

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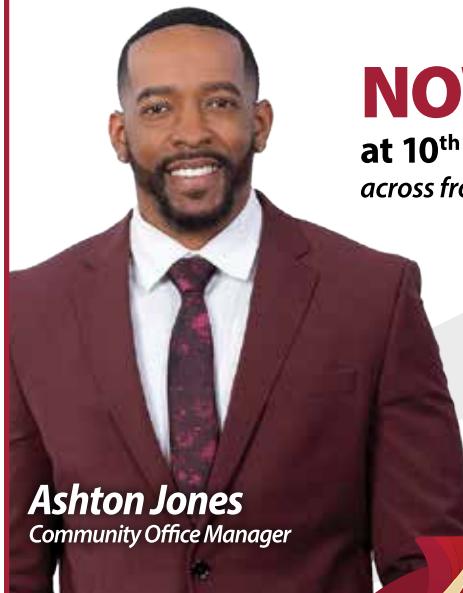
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FEATURE

Erie's 2025 FOOD FIGHT!

A battle royale between fiercely defended local fare

By: Erie Reader Staff

People in Erie can get real serious when it comes to defending their favorite haunts. Opinions hold the weight of facts in this town when it comes to local fare — be it donuts, beer, chocolates or, for the purposes of this feature, wings, pizza, and burgers.

We thought it would be fun to pit Erie Reader staff member opinions against one another and let the situation devolve into a good, old fashioned food fight. We based the contending dishes on the winners and runners up of their respective Best of Erie categories and had some fun chowing down on some tasty grub and arguing about it. As most games should be, this is mainly for fun and we'll let you, the reader, decide who's right. The real winners are all the local businesses that get a spot in the ring and hopefully some of your support! Let's get ready to rumble!

Chicken Wings

This food fight goes down between Contributing Writer Jonathan Burdick representing the winner of 2024's Best of Erie's Best Wings Odis 12 and Managing Editor Erin Phillips representing the runner up Park Tavern. 3, 2, 1... FIGHT!



Odis 12 (3702 W. 12th St.)

In their two decades of operation, Odis 12 has become an Erie institution. Peak Odis is when you go with a group, everybody orders different flavors, and the sharing ensues. When I go solo though, I'm a bit more traditional. I absolutely cannot resist their spin on the buffalo wing: the Trinity. It's a mouthwatering combination of buffalo sauce, blue cheese, and cajun smothered with parmesan, making for a crisp and flavorful symphony of deliciousness. I'd argue with anyone that Erie has the best wings in the country and it is Odis 12's consistency, creativity, and quality that make them a yearly contender for that top wing spot.

Park Tavern (4205 E. Lake Rd.)

Park Tavern has been a fixture in their Lawrence Park neighborhood since 1978. Serving generations of GE employees, locals, and visitors alike, absolutely no one leaves without feeling like they just had the best wings of their life. Infinitely customizable, I strongly recommend the Herbie Cajuns, crispy (the wings take a trip to the broiler after frying) and sloppy (but options exist for varying levels of slop, spice, and crisp). Flavorful, just the right amount of heat, saucy but not gelatinous. And the vibe of the Tav gives traditional Erie corner bar in the best way — completely without pretension or any sense of fanciness. Go ahead and get unapologetically messy, all up in those big ass wings.

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FEATURE

Pizza

This food fight goes down between Copy Editor Matt Swansenger representing the winner of 2024's Best of Erie's Best Pizza John's Wildwood Pizza and Local Government Correspondent Alana Sabol representing the runner up ippa Pizza Napoletana. 3, 2, 1... FIGHT!



John's Wildwood Pizza (105 Erie St., Edinboro // 6008 Knowledge Pkwy)

John's Wildwood Pizza has nurtured me back to life more times than I can count. More often not from the dregs of college hangover (although it has), but from the doldrums of the day-to-day. The installation of John's within the Erie Brewing Company's Knowledge Park location (aka Pub & Pie) has been a godsend since blossoming into proper adulthood, back pain and mortgage payment and all (its opening perfectly coincided with my thirties and resettling near my alma mater of Penn State Behrend). There's little mystery to its annual conquest of the Best of Erie Best Pizza category — a John's slice is beautifully balanced, with a sturdy enough base to support the requisite toppings (for me, it often includes the time-honored combination of sausage and roasted red peppers) without sacrificing the pliability you might find in a NY-style pie. The sauce contributes exactly what it's supposed to — natural tomato sweetness and tang with undertones of oregano and garlic. The crisp, gently charred crust readily unfurls to reveal a tender interior with a delightful chew. To scrap it almost seems a shame.

ippa Pizza Napoletana (in the Flagship City Food Hall, 22 N. Park Row)

Naples, Italy is the one place in the world where I could easily eat an entire pizza by myself. ippa Pizza Napoletana is a close second. I have been frequenting ippa since they were a food truck. Now, they have their own brick and mortar, still firing up pies that give a Neapolitan pizza experience without the plane ticket. The four base pizzas are simple, allowing the milled tomato sauce, handmade mozzarella, and blistered thin crust to take center stage. My chosen base is the ippa, which is essentially a margarita pizza dressed up with cream sauce and basil pesto. I added mild sausage for protein. What kept me coming back for more, slice after slice, is ippa's dough. With a thin and chewy texture, it is very digestible, a coveted element in authentic Neapolitan pizza. I felt satisfied without falling into a food coma, leaving plenty of room for gelato.

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Burger

This food fight goes down between Contributing Editor Nick Warren representing the winner of 2024's Best of Erie's Best Burger Bro Man's Sammiches and Media Editor Jessica Hunter representing the runner up Bar Ronin. 3, 2, 1... FIGHT!

NICK WARREN / JESSICA HUNTER



Bro Man's Sammiches (8228 Peach St. // 2614 Glenwood Park Ave.)

It's easy to fall in love with Bro Man's, even if you're not a Raiders fan. Now with two locations in Erie, Stephen Stanbro's menu of mouth-watering decadence is becoming a can't-miss local staple. For me it's all about the smash burgers. The way their edges crisp and crunch adds a texture I love, one that contrasts with the sauces and melted cheeses. I was all set to order the Sooner, one of their flagship burgers that even graced our March 2023 Reader cover. Then I saw a limited-time special called the "Johnny Blaze." As if I wasn't taken enough with the *Ghost Rider* reference, this monster is a double smash burger with ghost pepper Reaper cheese, Bro Man's signature BTP burger sauce, fresh cut jalapenos, lettuce, and tomato. I'm a heat seeker, so for me, this is pretty much a dream burger, that could right walk right onto the set of *Hot Ones*. Fear it, because that Reaper heat is one that stays with you. I genuinely hope that some form of the Johnny Blaze appears on the menu again because I would reorder it in one sweaty heartbeat.

Bar Ronin (948 W. Erie Plaza Dr.)

Bar Ronin is one of my absolute favorite local spots. I find myself coming back often with friends and family celebrating life together in their elegant yet casual space. Their Lucy Burger is all about balance — simple ingredients executed with precision. A rich, buttery pretzel bun holds a perfectly seared short rib patty, layered with high-quality double smoked cheddar that melts just right. The finishing touches are caramelized onions and Bar Ronin's signature Lucy sauce, adding a smooth, savory kick that ties it all together. It's a burger that doesn't need gimmicks — just great ingredients and expert technique. Bar Ronin knows how to elevate the classics!

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COLUMNS

Bird of the Month: Tundra Swan

Swan songs

By: **Mary Birdsong**

One of my favorite things to hear is a flock of Tundra Swans flying over my house as they head either south in the early winter or north in the spring. They are noisy in flight and when you first hear them in the distance, they sound like baying hounds. They fly in long lines and V formations like Canada Geese — their calls are more disorganized but delicate.

The last time we could hear them in Erie was in the fall when they were heading south to winter in shallow estuaries, freshwater lakes, ponds, and rivers on the Mid-Atlantic coast. In our region most are merely passing through, but some can be found during the winter months if there is open water in the lake and bay. They can often be found at Leo's Landing on Presque Isle State Park, which is where the Feather Observation platform is.

Right now, in March, Tundra Swans are beginning to journey north toward their breeding grounds in the arctic region of North America. There, they nest on

marshy tundra lakes (and yes, it's their breeding habitat that gives them their name).

Tundra Swans are large birds with a length of 49 inches and a wing span of 75 inches. They are mostly white and have a straight neck, which sets them apart from non-native Mute Swans which display a curved neck. Their bills are black but about 90 percent of the North American population show some yellow in the portion of the beak close to the eyes (called the lores).

Tundra Swan food sources can be found in aquatic and terrestrial environments and run the gamut from the leaves, roots, rhizomes, and stems of aquatic plants and grasses to mollusks. In water, they search for food by submerging their head and neck with their tails upended, an action called dabbling.

Increasingly, due to habitat changes on their migration route and wintering grounds, they forage in agriculture fields on waste grains, growing winter cereal grain crops, and potatoes.

As the month progresses, listen for their energetic calls overhead. If they



This month, lead shorebird monitor for Erie Bird Observatory Mary Birdsong tells us all about the "disorganized but delicate" Tundra Swan. Don't assume those birds flying in a V overhead are Canadian Geese — look closely and you might catch a glimpse of these majestic migratory swans.

sound like Canada Geese, but not quite, be sure to look up! You might be seeing and hearing an exuberant flock of Tundra Swans on the wing.

Mary Birdsong is the lead shorebird monitor for Erie Bird Observatory. Learn more at eriebirdobservatory.org or on their social media channels. She can be reached at mbirdsong@eriereader.com

Edwina Tries... Gas Station Indian Food

Kang's Steak and Grill is worth a visit

By: **Edwina Capozziello**

Readers may think I get to spend all of my time visiting cool local places and seeing great local performances (see my spotlight on *Bat Boy: The Musical* in this issue) on behalf of this publication. In reality, I have a full-time job with another fine institution with Erie in the name. My position there has me housed within the Erie Armory building five days a week, putting me just down the street from the Shell Station at 605 Parade St., home to Kang's Steak and Grill.

I have often heard rave reviews about Kang's french fries from coworkers returning to the office with to-go containers, filling the air with the drool-inducing scent of fried potatoes. But I wanted to try some of the traditional Indian selections the gas station restaurant offers. Better (and worse) writers than me have long made jokes, memes, and more about gas station food. But, in my own experience, it's often some of the tastiest food you can find. And Kang's did not disappoint!

Kang's has an extensive menu with traditional Indian fare as well as American food like cheesesteaks, burgers, and chicken wings. My partner and I chose a classic, butter chicken with naan as well as a fried fish sandwich with those famous fries on the side. The fish sandwich was a well-made version of exactly what you might expect, and those fries were as good as they smell. But the star of the show was the butter chicken with rice. It was perfectly seasoned and saucy but mild — not as spicy as I'd like or expect, but a flavor that would appeal to many palates. The chicken was all white meat, tender, juicy, and plentiful, with enough leftovers that I was able to take it for lunch the next day.

What is really exciting is that Kang's is open 24/7. Yes, that means I can answer late-night Indian food (or cheesesteak or burger or chicken wing) cravings and so can you! They even offer super affordable breakfast sandwiches — great news for all of my Erie Armory co-workers who may be reading this. Next time I visit I will be sure to order extra naan,



Have you ever wondered if you could be missing out on an amazing meal because you're reluctant to procure that meal from the inside of a gas station? This month, Edwina sets your mind at ease as she encourages readers to check out Kang's Steak and Grill, located inside the Shell station at 6th and Parade.

it was pillowy and delicious and ran out far too quickly.

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

The Reader Beat Monthly Recap

Summary of February 2025 council meetings

By: Alana Sabol

The Reader Beat aims to cover city and county council meetings as well as other important government and community-related meetings. The following is a summary of each meeting for the month of February.

City Council Feb. 5:

An ordinance to provide grants to low and moderate income homeowners for repairs was passed unanimously and concerns about ICE raids in Erie were addressed.

County Council Feb. 11:

A resolution to file suit to enforce the annual budget and prohibit the Brenton Davis administration from illegal tax collection was tabled.

City Council Feb. 19:

City Council Members Kathy Schaaf and Jasmine Flores discussed the need for another community center for unhoused people during the cold winters.

County Council Feb. 25:

The resolution to file suit to enforce the annual budget and prohibit the Brenton Davis administration from illegal tax collection was passed 4-3 and a resolution to conduct an audit of the budgets from 2023-2025 was passed unanimously. Several community members contributed during public comments to share their thoughts on the resolutions. "I've been asking for this audit since last January, and since then things have



gotten drastically worse," Councilman André Horton explained. "I'm in my 12th year and I haven't seen anything like this. Erie County's finances are in trouble."

City Council March 5:

The Police Athletic League honored Mel Witherspoon for nearly 45 years of contributing to youth programs. "PAL is a very important part of our community. It's an excellent program," Witherspoon said. "A lot of kids need direction and many of them don't get hugs when they go home." Additionally, concerns around immigration policies in Erie were discussed during public comments and addressed in the committee reports.

What's coming up this month?:

County Council Meeting, March 11 at 6 p.m.

City Council Meeting, March 19 at 6:30 p.m.

County Council Meeting, March 25 at 6 p.m.

For a detailed summary of all of these meetings, please visit eriereader.com/category/readerbeat

Take Your Beer for a Walk: 10th and State

Look back at this block in history on a St. Patrick's Day stroll

By: Jeff McCullor

When was the last time you took your beer with you when you left the house? Yeah, you know, put your shoes and jacket on, grabbed a beer, and took it with you (on foot of course, don't be silly). Well, in Erie you totally can! If you're within the 802 square miles of terra firma that makes up the city limits, it's 100 percent legal to have an open, non-glass container with you (provided you are 21+ years old).

With St. Patrick's Day on the proverbial doorstep, I'm taking my brewski on a stroll over to the northeast corner of 10th and State streets. Here you'll find the perfect perch for the annual parade (happening on Saturday, March 15), and Jekyll & Hyde's Gastropub is right there for any adult refueling needs. And while you enjoy your afternoon with a pint or two, I'll arm you with some local factoids that are guaranteed to improve your barstool conversation skills.

Look to the Northwest corner of 10th and State

The Soviet-esque former Avalon Hotel was once the location of the W.T. Grant Company, a stately looking department store that stood until the late 1960s. Back then, behind the W.T. Grant Co., the beaux-arts style Hotel Lawrence's impressive 12 stories would peek over all its neighbors. And to the left of the front door of W.T. Grant you would have seen a sign for Pulakos 926 — yep, this was the O.G. Pulakos store at 926 State, standing where the current patio space next to Rite-Aid is today.



Local brewery owner Jeff McCullor hopes that Erieites and visitors alike take full advantage of our city's lack of open container law to take their beer for a walk. This month, try heading downtown for St. Patrick's Day and imagining what the landscape looked like 100 years ago.

Walk South to 1307 State

The pro bartenders at Jekyll's will hook you up with a barley pop in a plastic cup for your stroll to the current home of FEED Media Arts, an impressively-renovated space at 1307 State Street. All that glass block used to be large windows displaying furniture settings for the Epps Furniture Company, chartered in 1921.

Wrap up your pint here or continue on to pay a visit to bartender Sean David Brown over at Calamari's Squid Row.

Drink local, and keep on walking.

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

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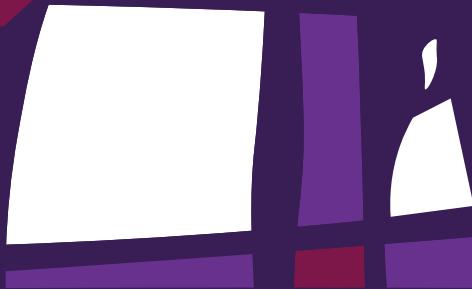


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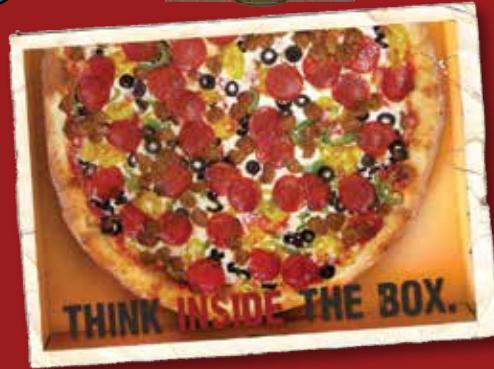
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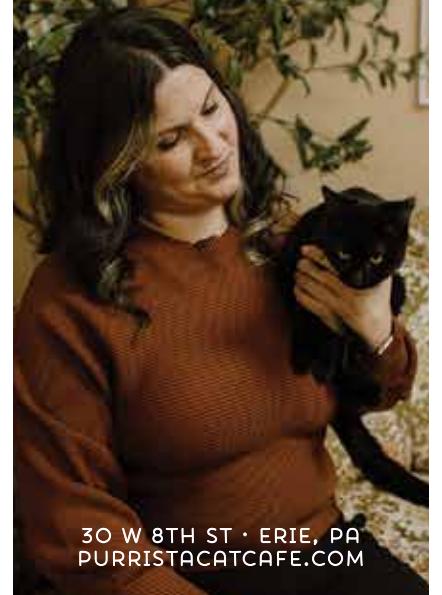
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Genius Prog Trio Consider the Source Returns to the Rook

The instrumental powerhouse will be joined by The Paulsibilities and onewayness

SATURDAY, MAR. 15

There's really nothing like Consider the Source. Active for over 20 years, the NYC-based instrumental progressive rock trio have all but confounded definition, perhaps best labeled as "sci-fi fusion." I believe YouTube commenter @joeray1655 said it best when he claimed that their music was "actually three wizards having a magical battle, but the senses of common man interpret it as music." Having seen them live several times, that's not far off. Their music is both transcendental and geometric. Psychedelic and mathematical. Iconoclastic and virtuoso.

Just look at guitarist Gabriel Marin. Studying technique and composition from North and South India, Eurasia, and the Middle East, he's combined that with jazz, fusion, and prog metal. He plays a custom-built, double-neck guitar, the top neck fretless (it should be noted at the rarity of this, as a quick Google search of "fretless guitar players" places Marin directly at the top of that list), with a MIDI setup (notably acting as 12 distinct EBows), its tremolo system bends up and down which

can simulate a keyboard's pitch wheel. Then there's one input jack, and four separate output jacks, and those five cables are just the ones going into his three different pedalboards.

Marin is far from alone in his mad-scientist-like instrumentation. Bassist John Ferrera — in addition to being a master of slap and dual-hand contrapuntal playing — can be seen with his own custom-made MIDI hardware that echoes an organ's pedal keyboard. Drummer Jeff Mann opts for a bevy of triggers and sequencers, all while switching between complicated time signatures at the drop of a hat.

Opening up for the band in the downstairs concert complex will be Erie's own blissfully avant garde improvisational madmen, The Paulsibilities. "We feel that both bands fit together on this bill like varnish on a piece of wood sanded by Bob Vila," explained Joe Cieslak, saxophonist for the Paulsibilities. He further joked that fans can expect "instances of unbridled joy, mirth, and tax preparation." The experimental soundscapes of Adam Holquist's onewayness will provide a sonorous soundtrack to



Catch the New York City-based instrumental progressive rock trio Consider the Source at the King's Rook Club this March — the group's mad-scientist-like instrumentation combined with their signature metal bent is sure to pack the house.

the upstairs afterparty.

Riding fresh off the September 2024 release of Consider the Source's album *The Stare*, expect to feel a heaviness that longtime fans might be surprised by. The five-song, 42-minute album has a genuinely metal bent, and not just thanks to ex Dream Theater producer

David Prater. Groovy and magical, it's one of the wildest records of the year. — Nick Warren

Doors open at 9 p.m., Show starts at 10 p.m. // King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. // \$12 in advance, \$15 at the door // 21+ // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com

Erie Philharmonic Welcomes Spring with Magic of the Guitar

Worldwide guitar virtuoso woos with Rodrigo concerto

SATURDAY, MAR. 15

The Erie Philharmonic is celebrating the return of spring with *Magic of the Guitar* featuring celebrated classical guitarist Miloš Karadaglić performing *Concierto de Aranjuez* by Joaquín Rodrigo. Alongside the concerto, the concert will feature Leonard Bernstein's *On The Waterfront* suite (from the 1954 Marlon Brando film), and Robert Schuman's *Symphony No. 1*.

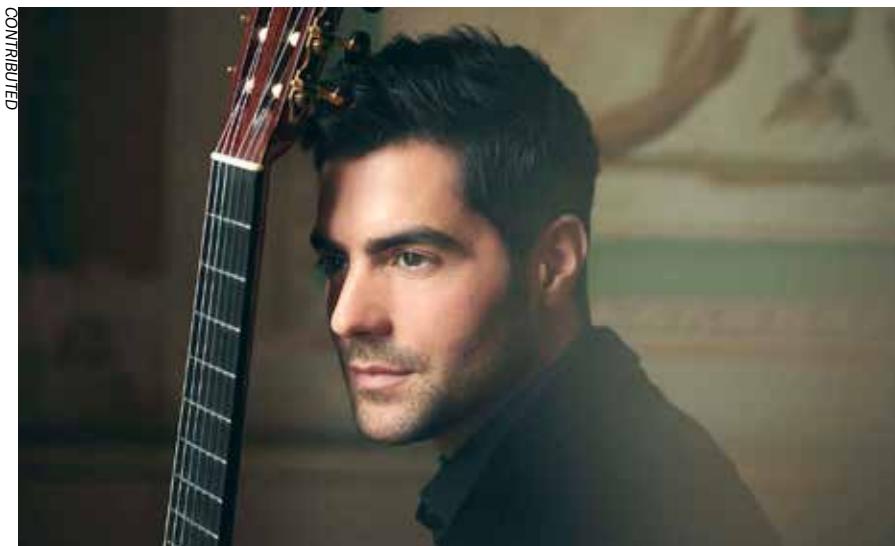
"Delve into Bernstein's thrilling *On the Waterfront* suite, a musical journey reflecting the film's powerful narrative. The evening sparkles with the renowned Miloš' guitar virtuosity, enchanting the audience," the Erie Philharmonic describes. "This concert blends cinematic intensity, exquisite guitar mastery, and symphonic beauty."

Schuman began to compose symphonic music in the 1840s, branching out from a repertoire consisting primarily of piano and vocal music at the encouragement of his wife and fellow composer Clara Schuman. Written over two months, Schuman's First Sympho-

ny premiered on March 31, 1841 with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn. The composition became known as the "Spring Symphony" due to Schuman's inspiration from the seasons and German poetry.

On The Waterfront, starring Marlon Brando, remains the only film score Bernstein ever composed. He initially declined to score the film but eventually accepted due to the promise of financial reward and critical acclaim, with recordings starting in April of 1954 before the film premiered in July. The process was unfavorable for Bernstein due to a lack of creative control over the music in the final edit. Reworking the score into a symphonic suite, he premiered his revised work in August 1955 at Tanglewood and the Hollywood Bowl.

Rodrigo took inspiration from the Royal Palace of Aranjuez in Spain for the concerto as he composed the piece in 1939. *Concierto de Aranjuez* premiered on Nov. 9, 1940 in Barcelona, with Spanish classical guitarist Regino Sainz de



Join the Erie Philharmonic at the Warner Theatre as they welcome a special guitar performance from Miloš Karadaglić with his revolutionary approach to classical guitar as he presents *Concierto de Aranjuez* by Joaquín Rodrigo.

la Maza as soloist. Miloš, who will step into that role with the Erie Philharmonic, has performed worldwide with the London Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, and the Cleveland Orchestra, becoming known for his revolutionary approach to classical guitar and helping to revive its popularity over the

past decade. Originally from Montenegro, he moved to London to attend the Royal Academy of Music and continues to advocate for music education and artistic excellence. — Thomas Taylor
7:30 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$17-\$61 // For tickets and info: eriereader.com



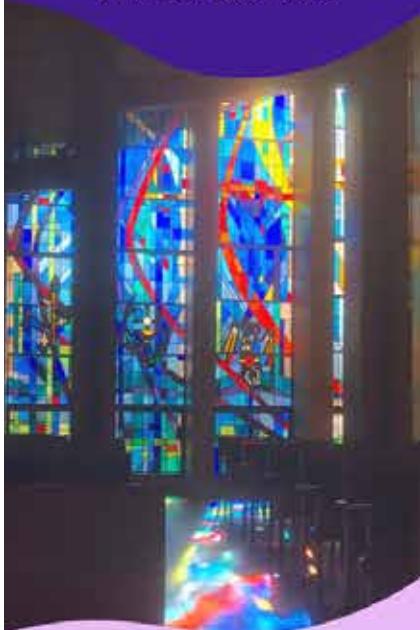
Lent Vigils

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Monastery Tour

On March 29, join us at 4:00 pm for a guided tour of the monastery, followed by supper with the sisters before the evening Lent Vigil.

Space is limited - RSVP by March 21 through eriebenedictines.org or call Michelle (814) 899-0614 ext. 2507

Benedictine Sisters of Erie



EVENTS

Celebrating Sarah Reed Week

The retirement center is celebrating its founder with a week of themed activities

BEGINNING SUNDAY, MAR. 16

Sarah Reed Senior Living is having a week full of fun activities for seniors to celebrate founder Sarah Reed's



CONTRIBUTED

The Sarah Reed retirement community plans to host a slate of community events in honor of their founder, Sarah Reed. The week of activities includes an informational talk given by local historian Melinda Meyer as well as a "Senior" Prom for the residents.

birthday, starting on March 16. During her life, Reed was instrumental in providing essential community services and contributing to social work.

The organization was founded by 30 women, including Reed, in 1871. It was known as "The Home for the Friendless" and provided services to disadvantaged people of all ages. The organization developed over its nearly 155 years, eventually diverging into two nonprofit organizations, one for children and one for seniors. According to a Hagen History Center blog post, after Reed passed away at the age of 96, "the organization was renamed in her honor — something the humble Reed never allowed during her lifetime."

From March 16 through March 21, Sarah Reed Senior Living will be organizing events and activities for seniors and themed events to honor Sarah Reed that are open to residents, families, and the community. On the 16th, the organization will throw a birthday social, not

only celebrating the founder but also three centenarian residents. On the 17th, there will be a presentation from local historian Melinda Meyer on Reed's life and the history of the organization.

On the 18th, there will be a musical tribute to Reed, featuring music from the mid to late 1800s and early 1900s. According to Personal Care Home Administrator Carey Mastrian, they will also be celebrating St. Patrick's Day with Irish music.

The 19th will kick off the retirement center's first "senior" prom. "We will have promposals from our current residents and then the week will culminate with our senior prom on the 21st at 6 p.m." Mastrian said. "We'll have music, residents will be attending, and families and friends have been invited as well." — Alana Sabol

Sunday at 3 p.m., Monday at 2 p.m., and Friday at 6 p.m. // Sarah Reed Senior Living, 227 W. 22nd St. // For more info: sarahreed.org

Bat Boy Uncaved!

Ryan Dawley revives iconic role at PACA

BEGINNING FRIDAY, MAR. 21

In 2004, Richard Davis cast Ryan Dawley in the titular role of *Bat Boy* because he was "small and wiry." Dawley revived the role in a second run in 2006. Both of those productions were at the now defunct Roadhouse Theatre. When approached about reprising the role for a 2025 PACA production, Dawley said, "I'm still small [but] a little less wiry." Director Robert Martin replied, "You haven't changed — let's do *Bat Boy*."

Dawley (40 Under 40 Class of 2024) credits his original 2004 run in this show as the start to his theater career. He moved to New York where he did regional theater for a time before relocating to Asia in 2009 to write and perform. COVID brought him home in 2020. Dawley is certainly a familiar face on local stages. In addition to PACA, he has performed at the Erie Playhouse, Meadville Community Theatre, Academy Theatre in Meadville, and Barrow-Civic Theatre in Franklin.

Director Robert Martin, a local theatrical veteran in his own right, is celebrating his 50th year in the Erie theatre scene. "My first role was at the Erie Playhouse as Tony in *West Side Story* in

the summer of 1974," says Martin. He's also directed PACA productions of *The Fantasticks* and *Weird Romance*. "It's always exciting to work in the intimate space provided by PACA. Mark Tanenbaum and his staff have all become involved with each of the productions I've directed," Martin adds.

Bat Boy: The Musical is described as a comedy-horror-rock musical based on a '90s *Weekly World News* story about a half-human, half-bat boy who grew up living in a cave. "*Bat Boy* is hysterical," says Dawley (who will be wearing fangs in the production). "You will laugh, you will cry... probably from laughing. It's also very dark. The characters are quirky, the music is fantastic, and the cast and crew are absolutely incredible. There is also plenty of blood," he adds.

Martin agrees, "Despite some pervading dark themes in this show, it could be described as outrageous fun." In addition to Dawley, the cast includes a long list of Erie stage favorites including Patrick Vahey, Camellia Tatara, Brenna Thummler, Rhonda Largo, Kat McMahan, Howard Lang, Bryan Toy, Zachery Hoffman, and Dan Bainbridge. While he adds that "the show has become some-



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Join the cast and crew of *Bat Boy*, including 2024 40 Under 40 honoree Ryan Dawley in the titular role, at PACA as they revisit the musical — a comedy-horror-rock musical about the headlining creature featured in a 1990s issue of the *Weekly World News*.

thing of a cult favorite for many theater fans after successful runs beginning off-Broadway in 2001 and in London's West End in 2004," he recommends the show for mature audiences due to adult themes. — Edwina Capozziello

Fridays and Saturdays, Mar. 21 through Apr. 5, and Thursday, March 27 at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, Apr. 6 at 2 p.m. // \$20 // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com



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Serious Ris: Intro to Risograph Classes at Grounded Print Shop

Learn digital screenprinting technique from an expert

MONDAY, MAR. 24

There is something curious happening in Erie's Little Italy neighborhood — shops, bars, and eateries with youthful, vibrant energy are popping up, like Give A Crepe, in its new location at West 19th and Chestnut streets. The music venue-cum-cheesesteak spot Philly on the Rocks is rocking at West 18th and Chestnut. Grounded Print Shop, which opened its doors in 2019 at West 19th and Cherry, has always served multiple purposes in the community, from selling handmade paper goods, to offering memberships and studio space for artists, and offering classes and workshops — like this month's Intro to Risograph.

"Developed in the 1980s, a Risograph can be best described as a digital form of screenprinting," explained Ashley Pastore, owner and director of Grounded Print Shop. The class, which is led by Chris Pace, the owner of Leadhead Screenprinting, aims to demystify the Riso process and make it accessible to anyone who wants to learn. "We will

teach students how to transfer their artwork onto a computer and use various programs to make it suitable to be printed with the Risograph," said Pastore. She also mentioned that class participants will "leave with prints to take home."

Intro to Riso is a must for anyone who would like to use the machines with any regularity in the future (you can even join Grounded's Riso club). And if you miss March's class, it will repeat each month through June, at least.

"Because of its tactile nature and textural feel, the images made through this process feel personal," Pastore asserted. "This process is quite fast and allows for some room to play with layering and output pretty directly, making it an ideal way of producing both original artwork and books, as well as catchy marketing materials." — Cara Suppa

5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. // Grounded Print Shop, 1902 Cherry St. // \$30 // For more information and to register, visit: groundedprintshop.com



Learn a new artform this month at Grounded Print Shop as they offer their latest in a line of instructional classes — this one focusing on the unique print qualities of the risograph machine. Led by Chris Pace, the owner of Leadhead Screenprinting, the class aims to "demystify the Riso process and make it accessible to anyone who wants to learn."

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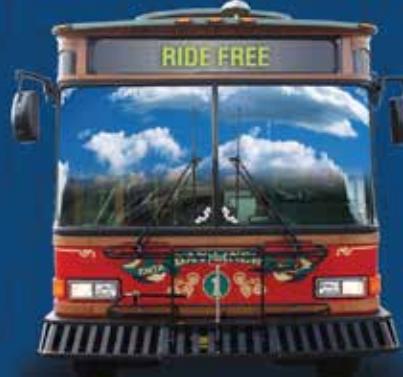
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EVENTS

Betty Buckley Brings Brilliance to MIAC Stage

Artist-in-residence returns to Mercyhurst

BEGINNING WEDNESDAY, MAR. 26

Acclaimed actress and singer Betty Buckley returns to Mercyhurst this month with a packed schedule. The artist-in-residence is set to hold workshops with Mercyhurst students from Wednesday, March 26 through Friday, March 28, culminating in a public concert alongside Seth Rudetsky on Saturday, March 29 at 7:30 p.m. in the Walker Recital Hall.

With honorary doctorates from Boston Conservatory of Music and Marymount Manhattan College, Buckley has taught at numerous colleges and universities across the nation, including Boston University, the University of North Texas, and Carnegie Mellon. Her accomplishments span multiple mediums, with credits and awards both on and off Broadway, as well as in the film industry.

As one of the trailblazers of modern musical theatre, Buckley has seen iconic roles in shows like *Pippin*, *Carrie*, *Sunset Boulevard*, and *Cats*, the last of which earned her a Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical. In 2012,

As one of the trailblazers of modern musical theatre, Buckley has seen iconic roles in shows like *Pippin*, *Carrie*, *Sunset Boulevard*, and *Cats*, the last of which earned her a Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical.

Buckley was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame and in 2018 and 2019, she headlined the first National Tour of the new Broadway production of *Hello, Dolly!*

On the silver screen, Buckley has featured in films such as Lawrence Kasden's *Wyatt Earp*, Woody Allen's *Another Woman*, Roman Polanski's *Frantic*, and M. Night Shyamalan's *Split* and *The Happening*. Most recently, Buckley co-starred in 2024's *Imaginary* from Lionsgate and will feature in two upcoming films: Amanda Kramer's *By Design*, and A24 Studios' *Eternity*, starring Miles Teller and Elizabeth Olsen. Buckley has made her way into America's living rooms as well, with roles on shows like *Law & Order: SVU*, *Chicago Med*, and *Pretty Little Liars*.



Acclaimed actress, singer, and artist-in-residence Betty Buckley returns to the Walker Recital Hall on Mercyhurst University's campus in March alongside pianist, conductor, writer, and SiriusXM host Seth Rudetsky.

In 2022, Buckley released the compilation recording *Betty Buckley Sings Stephen Sondheim*, a tribute to the late composer. She has recorded 18 albums, received two Grammy nominations, and tours extensively with her ensemble of musicians. Buckley has also been awarded three Lifetime Achievement Awards for her contributions to theatre from the T. Schreiber School in New York City, The Shubert Theater in New Haven, and the New England Theatre Conference.

Buckley will be joined on March 29 by pianist, conductor, writer, and SiriusXM host Seth Rudetsky. Rudetsky's career includes many years on Broadway as a pianist and conductor, as well as two years as a writer on *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, receiving three Emmy nominations alongside his co-writers for the program. Currently, he is the afternoon DJ on the SiriusXM Broadway channel as well as the host of *Seth Speaks*.

Note: This performance is currently sold out. Additional tickets may be released the evening of the performance, Saturday, March 29. Seats will be sold to patrons waiting in the cancellation line on a first-come, first served basis. The box office will open at 6 p.m., but patrons may start lining up earlier in the day. For info: miac.mercyhurst.edu.

7:30 p.m. // Walker Recital Hall at Mercyhurst University, 501 E. 38th St. // Sold out (see note above) // miac.mercyhurst.edu

Let My People Go... See This Show

The Prince of Egypt premieres at the Erie Playhouse

BEGINNING FRIDAY, MAR. 28

You've heard the story of the Pharaoh's lethal order, of the burning bush, the plagues over Egypt, and the parting of the Red Sea. Now, get ready to be delivered an experience like no other. For the first time in Erie community theater history, *The Prince of Egypt* will make its appearance on the Erie Playhouse's Mainstage.

The Prince of Egypt is the story of Moses, a young Hebrew man who leads the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Before he can accomplish such a feat, however, he is challenged by his adoptive brother, the newfound Pharaoh Ramses, as well as God, to be sure his faith is true.

With uplifting songs like the Academy Award-winning "When You Believe," Director Richard Davis is excited to bring Stephen Schwartz's beautiful score to the audience.

"I find it a personal joy to bring a group

of relative strangers together to not only create and tell a wonderful story, but to watch them grow as performers and make friends that will last them a lifetime," Davis said. "That is what the Playhouse did for me in my youth and it is great to give that gift to others."

This production will include a wide range of talent in its cast, including Chelsea Gardner (Yocheved) and Yasmeen Sara Taoukhi (Tziporah) in their debut roles. Several members of the dancing and singing ensembles will also make their debut.

According to Davis, "The stage version is still very new and we are one of the first community theatres to be granted the rights to perform it." This premiere knowledge, on top of the limited showtimes available, will mark this a truly unforgettable experience for all.

Although *The Prince of Egypt* is intended for all ages, some of its content may not be suitable for younger audi-



Actors John Burton and Krista Perry star in the Erie Playhouse's latest production, *The Prince of Egypt* – a musical version of the story of Moses – playing on the LECOM Stage through March and April.

ences.—Cassandra Gripp

Fridays and Saturdays, Mar. 28 through Apr. 13 at 7:30 p.m. // Thursday, Apr. 10 at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays, Apr. 6 and Apr. 13 at 2 p.m. // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. // \$19-30 // For tickets and info: erieplayhouse.org

WQLN's Erie Craft Beer Fest

Something's a-brewing

SATURDAY, APR. 12

Raise a glass, as one of the region's biggest craft beer festivals is returning to Union Station. The Erie Craft Beer Fest hosted by WQLN gives beer aficionados a chance to sample some of the best hops and barley in and around the Keystone State. There will be more than 20 breweries this year including local favorites like Lavery Brewing Company, Black Monk Brewery, Erie Ale Works, Five & 20, Nostrovina Brewing Company, and The Brewerrie at Union Station. Some new breweries featured at this year's event are Rising River Brewing (Macungie, Pa.), Quinn Brewing Company (Irwin, Pa.), Thirsty Dog Brewing (Akron, Ohio), and Firewhistle Brewing (Elizabeth, Pa.)

As usual, the fest will be held in the Concourse side of Union Station, leaving the Brewerrie open for visitors to order food and additional beverages before, during, or after the event. Along with the wonderful WQLN Staff, musician Jack Stevenson will be on hand, entertaining guests with his one-man band, covering classic, crowd friendly, singalong songs.

If you need to take a break from swigging suds, you can check out Buona

Cucina Oils and More, a locally owned artisan shop that specializes in olive oils, vinegars, herbs and more. Tree and Ink Studio will also be vending. They are a husband-and-wife business that specializes in laser engraving, woodworking, printing, and personalized gifts. Food available on the Concourse side will be provided by GramE's Kitchen (from Meadville) and Jacked Jerky (from Erie).

Events like these are key to WQLN and its mission in our community. Fundraising Engagement Manager Jocelyn Taylor comments, "It's a vital fundraiser that supports our mission to stimulate, enrich, educate, and entertain the public. Proceeds from this event help provide free educational access to our broadcast and digital programming, while allowing us to maintain outreach to underserved children and minority communities. With 80 percent of our funding coming from membership and community support, events like the Erie Craft Beer Fest ensure we continue to make a meaningful impact in our region."

The event runs for three hours, but for a little extra cash, attendees can purchase a VIP ticket which allows for



Head down to Union Station to sample the spectrum of local brews at Erie's Craft Beer Fest hosted by WQLN. Enjoy the offerings from over 20 local and regional breweries, all while supporting the important work of public broadcasting.

an extra hour at the front end. Help raise money to bolster an essential asset in our community, all while enjoying a few drinks with some friends.—Larry Wheaton

4 to 7 p.m., or 3 p.m. entry for VIP ticket holders // Concourse of Union Station, 117 W. 14th St. // 21+ // For tickets and info: wqln.org

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2025

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Walk Information & Registration | SCAN HERE!

✉ info@autismnwpa.org
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 ☎ 814.455.3540

Event made possible in part by:



Cheekface

Middle Spoon
Self-Released



The oddball indie trio Cheekface continues their streak of eccentric jams with mildly diminishing returns. Forming in 2017, the self-proclaimed local band of America has been carving its lane in the indie scene over their past four records. With a dry sense of humor filled with one-liners and obscure name-drops and references, the band's lyrics are akin to the absurdist diatribes of Talking Heads or B-52s recordings. Sonically, the band pulls a lot from third-wave ska: the sounds of assertive guitar riffs and horn sections work in tandem with the lyrics to create the singular experience that is listening to a Cheekface record. 2025's *Middle Spoon* is the band's fifth studio album and the first where the cracks of the threesome's foundation are starting to show. Specifically, the band's esotericism has begun to wear a little thin. Conversely, little chance is taken on the auditory front of the album. While the greater emphasis on horns is appreciated, it is nothing new to the Cheekface canon. However, credit must be given where credit is due — *Middle Spoon* is still an engaging listen. Most of the weight is pulled by the vocals and lyrics of Greg Katz and Amanda Tannen. They never fail to crack a humorous joke that makes you smile. While not the first record I would recommend for new listeners, *Middle Spoon* continues to showcase Cheekface's ability to dominate in their lane. — Nathaniel Clark



Kim Deal

Nobody Loves You More
4AD



The indie elder stateswoman Kim Deal, best known as a founding member and bassist for the Pixies and guitarist/vocalist for the Breeders, has released her debut album *Nobody Loves You More*. Deal started writing this album after her second departure from the Pixies in 2011 — it's been 13 years in the making and features fellow Breeders members Jim MacPherson, Mando Lopez, and Kelly Deal. Additional contributors include Fay Milton and Ayse Hassan from Savages, Raymond McGinley of Teenage Fanclub, and Jack Lawrence from the Raconteurs. *Nobody Loves You More* is sleek in its production but remains tied to the lo-fi movement. The album opens with the horn- and string-heavy titular track "Nobody Loves You More," followed by "Coast," in the vein of Blondie on "Sunday Girl." As the album progresses, upbeat songs like "Crystal Breath" and "Big Ben Beat" will get you moving, while songs like "Are You Mine?" (a song written about watching her mother struggle with Alzheimer's) and "Summerland" are more contemplative. Tracks like "Disobedience" harken to Breeder's *Last Splash* (1993) and "Wish I Was" cites *Pod* (1990). Lyrically, Deal delivers lines typical of a Breeders release, but sonically, she explores more genres, specifically on the (mainly) acapella song "Bats In The Afternoon Sky" — airy, but in a noisy way. The album feels familiar yet fresh, a must have for fans of Deal's previous work. — Larry Wheaton



Califone

The Villager's Companion
Jealous Butcher Records



Sometimes coffee is just coffee. If fortunate, it's a damn fine cup to savor with eyes closed — no searching for words. Many genres are thrown at walls trying to define Tim Rutili's Califone. Time wasted categorizing is better spent listening. Red, Red Meat fans have been watching Rutili unfold like a time-elapsed film of flowers blooming. This album contains ghosts of collected sounds, instinctive as a simple folk song or deliberate as industrial discord. There is lifting orchestration competing with the drone of a box fan. This is twilight music. As the sun departs leaving vibrant hues with bright stars splattering across the sky, all we see are silhouettes in elaborate shadow plays. Rutili looks into the abyss and comes back to report upon the rich beauty of the overlooked, the forgotten, and the mundane. His vocals are deceptively gentle in the delivery of complex lyrics. He gives directions via twisting roads which inevitably leave one lost in verdant Lovecraftian forests. Each musician in Califone becomes a part of the mighty river carrying Rutili's raft smoothly towards the rapids. Every track is engaging, although there are favorites like: "Bullet b4 the Sound," "Gas Station Roller Doggs," "Every Amnesia Movie," "Jaco Pastorius," and "Burn the Sheets, Bleach the Books." — Melissa Sullivan Shimek



Alex McLaughlin

A Brand New State
Self-released



The album *A Brand New State* fittingly opens with an unaccompanied double bass melody. The bandleader, and album's composer, Alex McLaughlin uses his instrument to rightfully lay claim to the 49 minutes that follow. As the whole band fills in the repeated harmonic minor motif, the record begins to settle in wonderfully. Knowing McLaughlin, the album name is fitting, with the Erie native and Mercyhurst alum having recently moved to Idyllwild, California (where he now serves as the jazz program director at the Idyllwild Arts Academy). In Los Angeles, he was joined by pianist Jeremy Siskind, trumpeter Jeremy Pelt, and drummer Tina Raymond. What might be my favorite track, "Trailhead" recalls a Wayne Shorter or Joe Henderson cut: dark, dense, and unforgiving. The modal exploration of "Signals," is next, giving perhaps the best solo sections from both Siskind and Pelt. The hypnotic drums of "The Solar Punks" showcases Raymond exquisitely. There's the understated delicacy of "Lily" which creates an almost cinematic air of mystery. That's followed by the head-bobbing groove "El Polvo" with its ascending and descending piano solo. Penultimately, there's a laid-back nonchalant tone of "Trial" that would be perfectly at home in a French new wave film. The frenetic effervescence of "Elevation" seems to have every note and rhythm bouncing around a tight room, building, and eventually leaving us exactly where we began, with McLaughlin's bass. — Nick Warren

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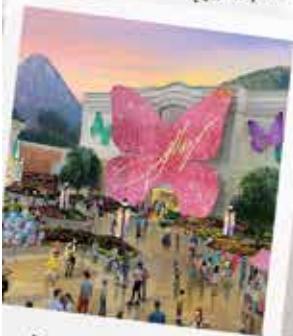
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FEATURE

Gem City Style

Interviews with some featured Erie restaurateurs

By: Jessica Hunter

This month, I caught up with some of the chefs and creators behind some featured fare in our annual food issue. I asked each of them: If you could invite any person to dinner, who would it be? What would be on the menu? What would you talk about?

Jason Spore, owner of ippa Pizza (featured in Erie's 2025 FOOD FIGHT!)

If I could invite anyone to dinner it would be Steve Jobs, American entrepreneur, inventor, and investor who co-founded Apple Inc. in 1976. We would have ippa Pizza of course!

Jobs was known to be a vegan, eliminating all animal products — including dairy — from his diet. At times he was even a fruitarian. Since I don't believe in putting fruit on pizza I figure we could compromise and make a marinara pizza — a very simple Neapolitan classic with dough, sauce, oil, oregano... and no cheese!

Jobs was such an innovator, known for completely rethinking entire markets and industries. He was known to say, "A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them. Start with the customer experience."

I would love to speak with him about how he put together presentations that touched people's emotions at the core and created desires they didn't even know they had yet. I would love to hear his thoughts on today's artificial intel-

JESSICA HUNTER



Jason Spore, owner of ippa Pizza

ligence and cryptocurrency, and learn how his study and practice of Zen Buddhism influenced his ability to disconnect and think deeply about problems. It would be a fantastic, life-changing, and insightful experience for sure!

Alice DeGeorge, Co-owner of The Six Pack House of Beer (Featured in 2025's Can't Miss Dishes)

I would invite Barb Haggerty, who co-owned and operated the Plymouth Tavern with her husband Mike until her death in Oct 2018. I worked at the Plymouth Tavern from 1995 to 2008 as a server and a trivia host. During that time, I gained so much knowledge and insight from Barb and Mike about how

to run a successful small business.

As for what would be on the menu, I feel like it's always hard to have a good conversation with someone when you are eating a big meal. I would go for a casual dinner... I feel folks are usually the funniest around a table of fun food, drinks, and snacks. I would choose to have a few charcuterie boards at our table or a nice tapas food selection.

At our casual dinner, I would love to talk with Barb more than ever about tips and tricks she had learned from running the Plymouth in her time there (nearly 45 years!)

But what I really would want to do at dinner with Barb, would be to take the opportunity to let her know what a big influence she was to me, and how often I think of her to this day.

JESSICA HUNTER



Alice and Dave DeGeorge, owners of Six Pack House of Beer

Dave DeGeorge, Co-owner of The Six Pack House of Beer (Featured in 2025's Can't Miss Dishes)

I would invite my deceased grandfather, Chris DeGeorge, to dinner. He passed away when I was around 8 years old. So, I don't remember too much about him. I do know that he was a small business owner. He had a plastering and contracting business in Erie (as did my father, and myself as recently as 2022). In fact, he was known for plastering hundreds of houses in Erie. He was a fine craftsman!

I would take my grandfather to Ricardo's Restaurant. His wife's (my grandmother's) family used to own it back in the day. We would probably eat a deli-

JESSICA HUNTER



Scott Croyle, Head Chef at Roma's Italian Kitchen

cious Italian meal, maybe a steak. But definitely an order of fried zucchini with a side of marinara.

At dinner, I would want to know what life was like for him when he was younger. How did he start his business? Who taught him about plastering or how did he gain his skills? And what lessons did he learn owning and running his small business in Erie.

Scott Croyle, Head Chef at Roma's Italian Kitchen (Featured in 2025's Can't Miss Dishes)

The person I would like most to have dinner with would be my grandmother. She passed away when I was about 13 years old. She was a big part of my life, only living across the yard from my parents' house. I was at grandma's house even when I was not supposed to be. Most memories I have of her were in her kitchen and I believe it shaped my

future as a chef. It seemed she was always cooking and making people happy with food. Giant Sunday dinners were always the norm. She was a Syrian married to an Italian, so the food was diverse. A meatball recipe that has now made its way through generations, spanakopita, and Syrian bread were always on the table. I would have loved to have learned of her past and the history of all the food that my family still talks about as we do our best to recreate it.

Gem City Style is a monthly column featuring an intimate Q&A with someone making a creative impact in Erie. If you or someone you know would make a good fit for a future Gem City Style, email jessica@eriereader.com

Note: This edition of Gem City Style was edited for length and clarity — for the full version, visit us online at eriereader.com

Mickey 17 is a Blunt but Fun Sci-Fi Flick

A look into "human resources"



Bong Joon Ho (*Parasite*, *Snowpiercer*) is not known for subtlety. His films are open and obvious critiques of capitalist systems and that is what makes them so entertaining. This hasn't changed one iota with his new sci-fi satire *Mickey 17*, a film that definitely wears its heart on its sleeve. Its story is muddled and often too scattershot for its own good, but it never loses that sense of entertainment and sincerity that has become synonymous with Bong's style.

In the 2050s, Mickey Barnes (Robert Pattinson) signs up for a space colonization crew to escape a debt to loan sharks. Unfortunately, in his haste, he signs up as an "expendable," a crew member who will do the most dangerous missions and be cloned every time he dies. However, after an 18th Mickey is created when the 17th one is erroneously presumed dead, the colony now has a "multiples" problem. Soon the Mickeys find themselves in the middle of an ethical and philosophical debate

while tensions rise between the humans and their new planet's indigenous inhabitants.

Typical of Bong, his political critiques could not be more obvious; in this case how the elites will enrich themselves at the expense of human life. That message often gets bogged down in an abundance of subplots, about half of which don't really go anywhere. That said, the main story is an entertaining one, the acting is strong (especially Pattinson's dual roles), and it has a rare sense of optimism not common in Bong's work. *Mickey 17* may not be up to the heights of Bong's best work, but it makes for a fun ride. — Forest Taylor

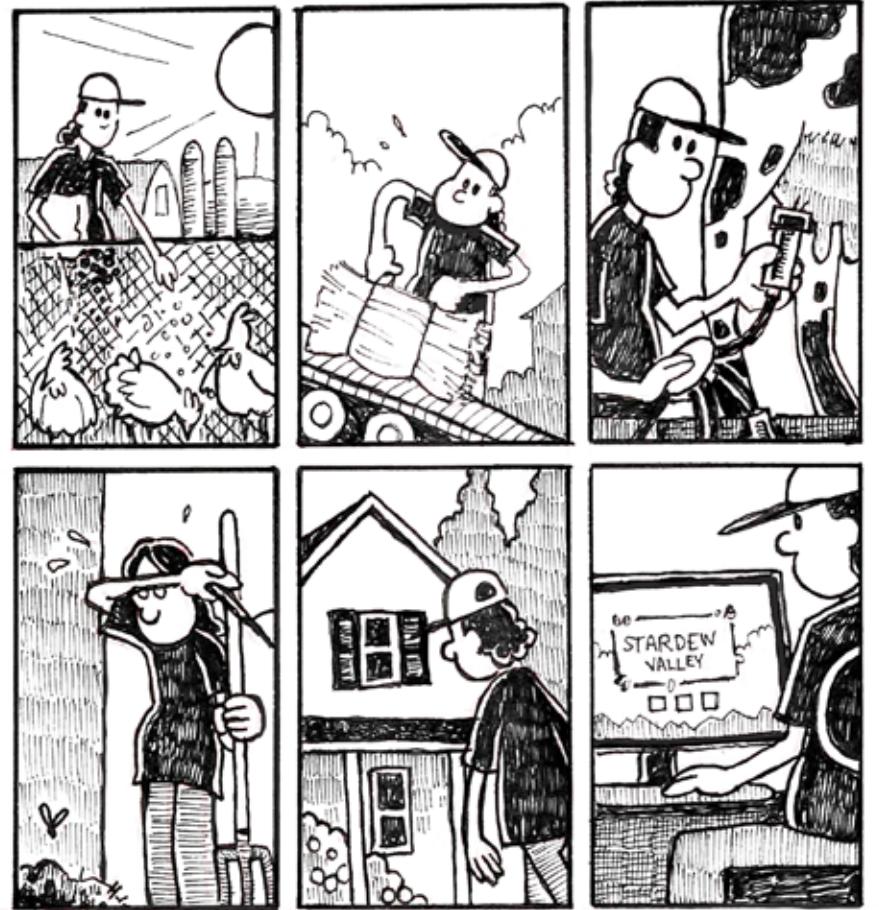
Written and directed by Bong Joon Ho // Based on the novel Mickey 7 by Edward Ashton // Starring Robert Pattinson, Naomi Ackis, Steven Yeun, Anamaria Vartolomei, Steve Park, Patsy Ferran, Tim Key, Holliday Grainger, Michael Monroe, Edward Davis, Toni Collette, and Mark Ruffalo // Warner Bros. Pictures // 137 minutes // Rated R





AT FARM'S LENGTH

BY BRAD PATTUOLO ©2025 bradpattulo.com



JUST TOYIN' WITCHA — BY B. TOY

"Wherever there is interest and power to do wrong, wrong will generally be done."

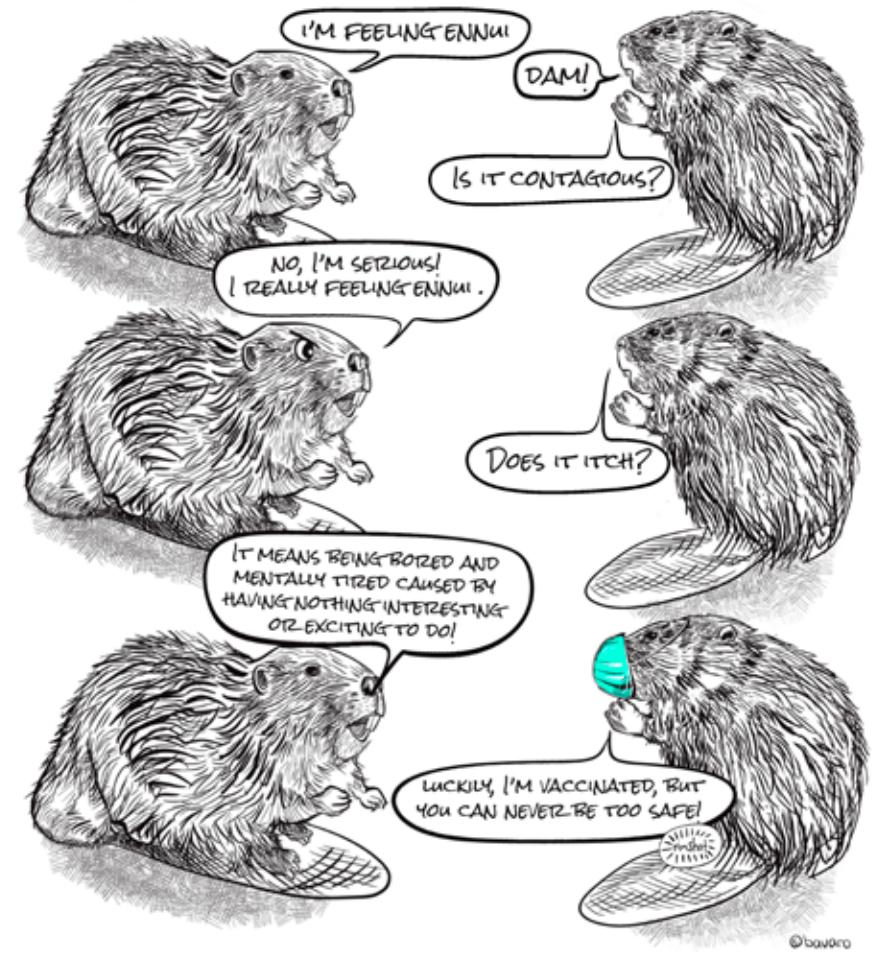
James Madison



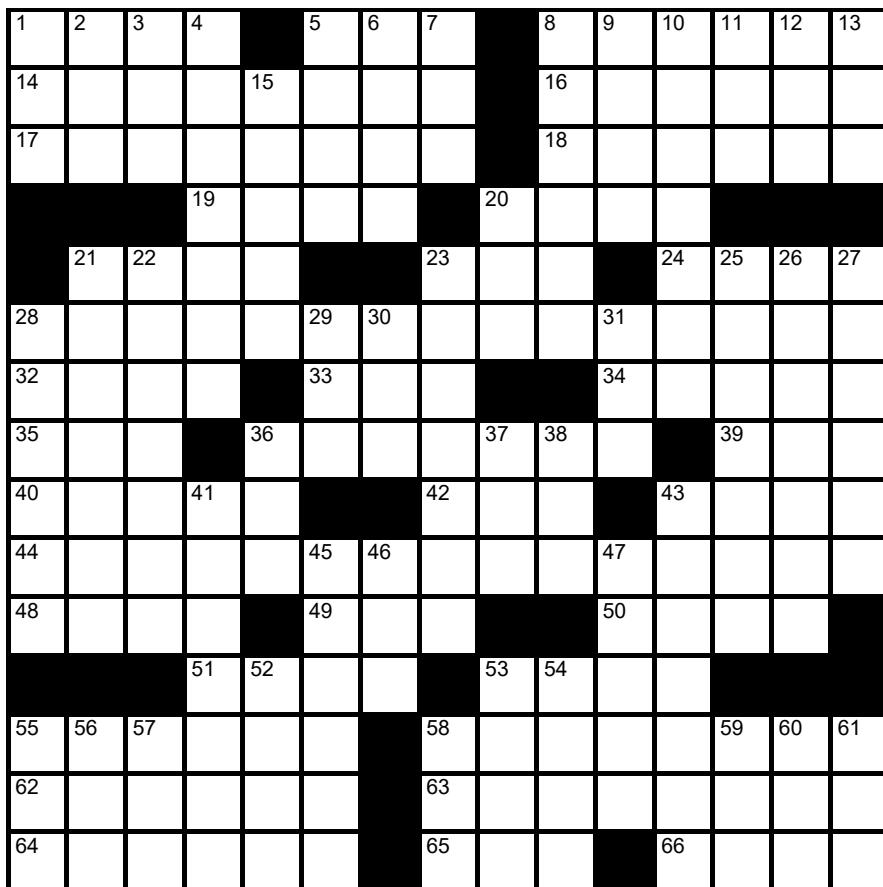
Fish that Talk

BY JOHN BAVARO

In: BEAVER BOREDOM



CROSSWORD



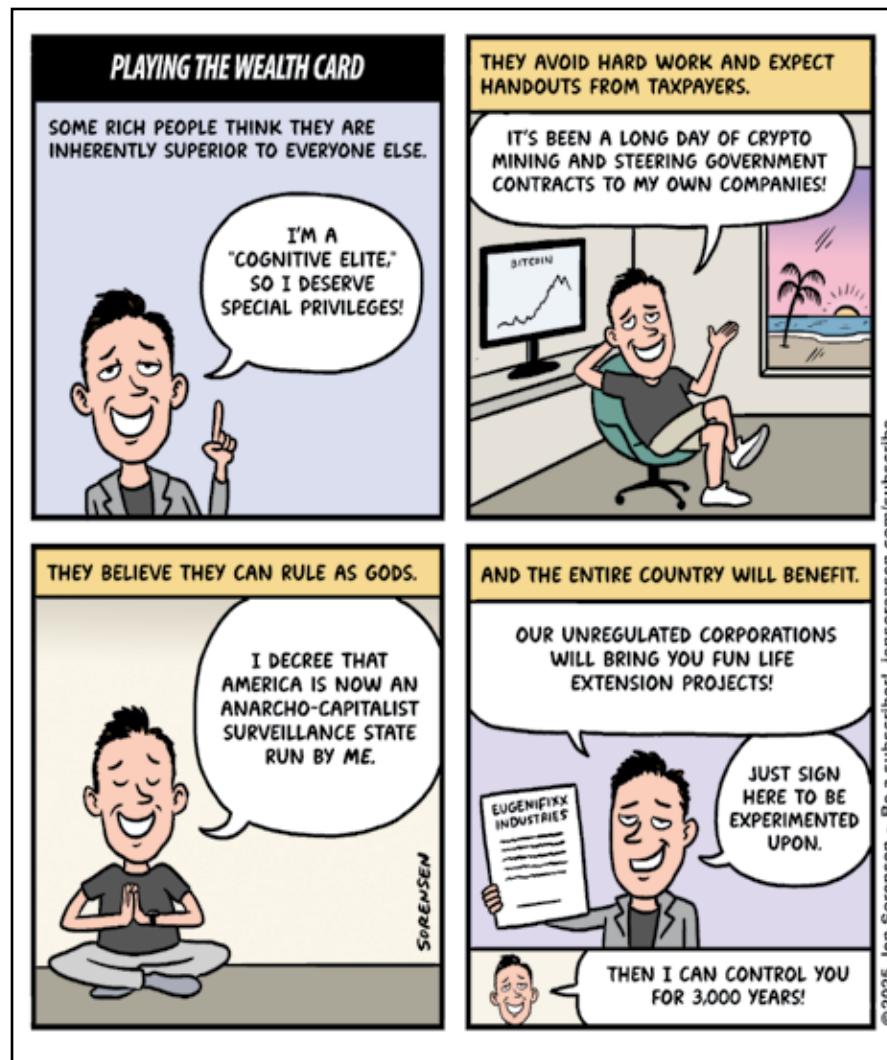
Across

- 1. En ___ (with full attendance, as a court)
- 5. Fundamental end?
- 8. Blew a gasket
- 14. The whole A to Z
- 16. Cynthia's costar
- 17. With "The," 1987 Michael Cimino epic adapted from a Mario Puzo novel
- 18. Fairly new
- 19. Yacht post
- 20. Coin-op opening
- 21. "Carpe ___!"
- 23. Pasty luau dish
- 24. Airport counter name
- 28. 1999 comedy about kids trying to get to a KISS concert
- 32. Tabula ___ (blank slate)
- 33. ___ Lanka
- 34. "Dune" star Isaac
- 35. City renamed Tokyo in 1868
- 36. First musical to win Best Picture since "Oliver!" in 1968
- 39. "I Like ___" ('50s campaign slogan)
- 40. Gp. running Sarah McLachlan-backed ads since 2007
- 42. More than vexation
- 43. "Fargo" family name
- 44. 1944 musical starring Judy Garland
- 48. Without
- 49. Cleaning cloth
- 50. Part of MIT, for short

Down

- 1. ___-relief (sculpture style)
- 2. Frazier foe
- 3. Video game figure not controlled by the gamer (abbr.)
- 4. Mythical hybrid
- 5. Sacred bird, to ancient Egyptians
- 6. Airline assignment
- 7. ___ Dew (brand with a Baja Blast flavor)
- 8. Breadstick seasoning
- 9. Cookie brand
- 10. Mints in a little case
- 11. "___ Martin: SAP" (2023 Netflix standup special)
- 12. Columnist Landers
- 13. "Who ___?" (New Orleans Saints chant)
- 15. San Antonio mission, with "the"
- 20. Phillipa of "Hamilton" and "Doctor Odyssey"
- 21. Global low point

- 22. "Come on in"
- 23. Market strategy
- 25. Like some circles?
- 26. "Seems to me ..."
- 27. U.K. ambulance toppers (that probably go "wee-oo-wee-oo")
- 28. Freud concern
- 29. "Sorta"
- 30. Prefix meaning "three"
- 31. "Rock and Roll, Hoochie ___"
- 36. Video taker, briefly
- 37. "___ Poetica"
- 38. Understand
- 41. Some diagnostic tests
- 43. Word before freak or group
- 45. Removes data from
- 46. Ziering of "Beverly Hills, 90210"
- 47. Bed sheet material
- 52. Soap star Springfield
- 53. "Arrested Development" star Michael
- 54. "... three men in ___"
- 55. Half-___ macchiato
- 56. 1996 Olympics host city, for short
- 57. Mauna ___ (Hawaiian peak)
- 58. Simple sandwich, casually
- 59. "Hairspray" actress Zadora
- 60. Request
- 61. Word before a maiden name



Answers to last puzzle





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