

# Erie Arts & Culture IMPACT REPORT

APRIL 2020

Patrick Fisher  
Executive Director



Erie Arts & Culture experienced exceptional growth in 2019. The team entered 2020 poised to carry that momentum through the calendar year. By the end of the first quarter of the year, the world as we knew it changed as a result of COVID-19. With these changes, the agency adapted its programs and services while still driving forward with its goals and objectives. Below we will highlight many of the successes and new developments of the agency in Q1.

## WELCOMING NEW BOARD AND STAFF MEMBERS

The agency welcomed three new members to its Board of Trustees in January, Mona Kang, Selena King, and Tim Palochak. The Board's slate of officers also changed to include George Espy (Chair), Jonathan Riley (Vice Chair), Coleen Stumpf (Treasurer), Bryan Timm (Secretary), and Tom Ferraro (Immediate Past Chair). The Board continued to work directly with the staff to implement and evaluate the strategic plan that was completed by Dr. Doug Borwick in 2019. A renewed focus has been placed on diversifying the agency's revenue stream to include a mix of earned income from fees for service, grants, and individual and corporate donations. The Board is now recruiting community members to serve on Erie Arts & Culture's Fund Development Committee.

Chanel Cook joined the team at Erie Arts & Culture in the fourth quarter of 2019 to serve as the Director of Programs and Community Relationships. We also welcomed Jade Mitchell in February to serve as the Creative Director.

## EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

In quarter 1, Erie Arts & Culture:

**Secured Program Funding**

**Launched the Creative Catalyst Speaker Series**

**Welcomed Hope McMath**

**Hosted 2 of 7 visiting artists in residency**

**Established the PRO Network**

**Created and distributed the Emergency Financial Relief Fund**

The agency received funds during the first quarter of the year from Erie Insurance and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) to launch a new artist residency program called Creating with Community, which you can learn more about in a later section of our Impact Report. Funds from that contribution also allowed Erie Arts & Culture to

launch the **Creative Catalyst Speaker Series** as a mechanism for expanding the community's perspectives around the role that the arts can play in social change. We welcomed our first speaker, **Hope McMath**, in February. The series will continue through the year with an additional 2-3 presenters.

Erie Arts & Culture also received a special grant from the Erie Community Foundation to launch a visiting artist residency program in collaboration with Jacksonville-based arts organization Long Road Projects. Funds allow for seven artists to take temporary residence in Erie to create new bodies of work while also engaging with the community. **Stephon Senegal** from New York City served as our first artist in residence during the month of February. **Kate Sikorski** from Los Angeles served as our second artist in residence during the month of March. In June, we are slated to welcome Sharon Norwood from Savannah.

Stephon Senegal, Visiting Artist In Residency



Hope McMath, Creative Catalyst Speaker



Erie Arts & Culture believes that creative and cultural professionals can play a central role in developing vibrant and healthy communities when they are provided with access to professional development, resources, and opportunities. The agency was awarded a \$25,000 Art Works grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to establish the **PRO Network**, a suite of workshops, webinars, and professional development tools intended to build the capacity of artists and art workers in our region. Initial topics being explored include financial literacy and planning, legal matters, and marketing and communication.

## Our Response to COVID-19

When Governor Wolf declared a state of emergency, Erie Arts & Culture knew that many creative and cultural professionals would find their income streams severely impacted. Musicians, for instance, operate in the gig economy and rely on live events and social gatherings to generate income. Unfortunately, many of our region's artists live paycheck to paycheck with no financial safety net. To assist those in our sector experiencing financial hardship as a result of COVID-19, Erie Arts & Culture launched the Emergency Financial Assistance Fund for creative and cultural professionals. The fund was seeded with \$39,600 from the Erie Arts Endowment. In Q1 this funding came at a crucial time for artists who were ineligible for standard unemployment benefits prior to the passing of the CARES Act.



### By the numbers:

- 1<sup>st</sup> grant cycle** (closed on 3/20): EAC's review panel received 77 applications requesting support. 45 applicants were awarded funds totaling **\$13,200**
- 2<sup>nd</sup> grant cycle:** (closed on 3/31) EAC's review panel received 96 applications requesting support. 49 applicants were awarded funds totaling **\$14,000**.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> grant cycle:** With 175+ new requests for assistance during the month of April, a 3rd round of funding will close on **4/30/2020** and applications will be reviewed and scored.

## MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS

Jade Mitchell, Creative Director



Erie Arts & Culture is an integral part of the positive developments happening every day in the Erie community. As we demonstrate in this report, our agency has much going on. In Q1, we laid the foundation for an IMPACTful rest of the year.

In my role, I help to tell the stories of our artists, residencies, and opportunities through our digital media channels (social media accounts, press releases, blog postings, advertising, email marketing, and website content.) I work with regional presenters of creative and cultural activities and events to ensure that their programs reach a broad audience. I also design all traditional marketing materials, such as this report. All of this is called "content." Some of our content goals for Q1 and beyond are to:

### Amplify Unheard Voices:

As we continue to identify and develop diverse artists, we must share their stories and impact. In particular, our Creating with Community initiative involves artists from a variety of backgrounds. Many of these artists have not worked with EAC previously. As their residencies progress, we are excited to share their stories and communicate their impact to our broader audience.

### Increase visibility and positive perception of arts and culture in schools and the community:

This involves sharing our residency stories and outcomes with our general audience in compelling ways, as well as communicating the value of arts and culture in schools and the community.

### Promote arts and cultural events in the region:

This includes EAC events as well as events hosted by our Cultural Service Partners and smaller regional organizations. As one example, we redesigned our Cultural Weekly Forecast and promoted **38** total events in Q1.

### Provide and share resources and opportunities:

The current COVID-19 crisis has required the team to respond swiftly. Within just a few days of the crisis hitting Erie, we worked to get our Emergency Financial Assistance Fund application and campaign up and running. We have also shared **15** additional emergency resources with our audience.

In Q2 and beyond we hope to increase our digital audience size, continue to help to increase attendance at local and regional events (as the pandemic allows), and communicate the impact of our artists and creative professionals with our broader audience.





I joined the team at Erie Arts & Culture in the fourth quarter of 2019 to serve as the Director of Programs and Community Relationships. Under my leadership, the Programs and Services department has worked diligently to implement recommendations that were made in the agency's strategic plan, as well as ones suggested by the agency's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force. The Programs team includes Kristen Weibel, Kelly Armor, and Kristen Weeks, who joined Erie Arts & Culture in February. I am developing policies for my department that will ensure equity in how our agency distributes both opportunities and resources. Our team is happy to report that 2020 is off to an unparalleled start. We will maintain, if not exceed, the pace of 2019.

- Behind the scenes, we continue to identify opportunities to increase the positive impact of EAC's programming - both financially and by partnering with other civic and cultural organizations.
- We are committed to looking beyond our backyards to see the world through fresh perspectives.
- We are strategically identifying and developing diverse artists, increasing visibility and positive perception of arts and culture in schools and the community, and amplifying unheard voices.

To follow, we have curated a glimpse of the start of 2020 to share with you.

Sincerely,  
Chanel Cook

## Tom & Ed at Strong Vincent - Art Force

**Goal: Increase visibility and positive perception of arts and culture in schools**

Long-Term Residencies (LTR) provide funding for 60-day projects that offer in-depth interactions between rostered teaching artists and community stakeholders through workshops and classes. Tom Ferraro and Ed Grout are currently conducting an LTR at Strong Vincent Middle School. The project was given the name Art Force. As a collaborating stakeholder, Our West Bayfront contributed \$3,000 in matching dollars to this residency. Funds were raised by neighborhood residents and businesses during Erie Gives.

Residencies are process-driven. Tom and Ed started with a focus on teaching basic techniques of drawing, painting, mosaic, and 3D design. They then asked students to identify key community issues that were important to them. Working together, the students expressed that finding safe routes from their neighborhoods to the Bayfront was a leading concern. Tom and Ed then worked with the students to define ways that art could be used to raise awareness of, or resolve, the issue that they identified.

To broaden community involvement, the residency brought in key stakeholders, such as the City of Erie's Department of Planning and Traffic Engineering. Students also visited Gannon University where they presented their project to Dr. Chris Magno and his class. Dr. Magno's students are now creating a geographic information system (GIS) to map the safe routes and public art related to this project.

## Arts in Lifelong Learning: By the numbers

**8** Total residencies

**2** Counties served through residencies  
(Crawford: 1 and Erie: 7)

Artists who received paid opportunities through residencies:

**6** Teaching Artists

**9** Guest Artists



(Above)  
Drawings by Artforce Students: Students defined ways that art could be used to raise awareness of, or resolve, community issues.



(Right)  
GIS map created by Gannon Students.

## Forbidden by Definition

Goal: Amplify Unheard Voices

Directed by Marquis Wallace

Forbidden by Definition was an original production that combines multi-media, dance, music, and theatre.

- Two presentations of the production were held in February at East Middle School in celebration of Black History Month.
- The production received funds through Erie Arts & Culture's New Horizons initiative. It served as a reflection of the Black American experience and explored issues of identity, trauma, education, police brutality, and marginalization.
- Lea Bodine, a rostered teaching artist, simultaneously conducted a residency at East Middle School and her students participated as dancers in Forbidden by Definition.
- Collaborators included Dafmark Dance Theatre, Erie Dance Theatre, Sovereign Ballet, Chromatic Dance, and East Middle School.
- In total, 49 students from East Middle School participated in the production.

## New Horizons: Creating with Community Artist Residency Program

Goal: Identify and develop diverse artists

As part of its New Horizons initiative, Erie Arts & Culture launched the Creating with Community Artist Residency Program.

- This program is funded with support from Erie Insurance and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's Neighborhood Assistance Program.
- After responding to a public Request for Qualifications, 14 artists, paired into seven teams, have received paid opportunities to work with residents and organizations of neighborhoods in Erie's urban core to plan, implement, and evaluate placemaking projects.



- Projects are defined through the community engagement process, which is currently taking place, and the program will continue throughout the calendar year.
- 57% of the artists who received paid opportunities through the program identify as artists of color.
- The performing arts, literary arts, and visual arts are all represented by the artists collectively representing the program.
- For 11 of the 14 artists, this is their first time receiving a paid opportunity from Erie Arts & Culture.

## Discovery Trail Utility Box Project

Goal: Increase visibility and positive perception of arts and culture in the community

- In 2019, Erie Arts & Culture received a Shaping Tomorrow grant from the Erie Community Foundation. A portion of the funds were earmarked to assist the Erie Neighborhood Growth Partnership with activating their vision of establishing a culture and heritage trail, which is now being referred to as a Discovery Trail.
- After responding to a public Request for Qualifications, two artists and one artist team have been awarded commissions to create public art to enhance 24 utility boxes in Erie's urban core.
- Designs will communicate narratives related to the city, while also linking together our urban core neighborhoods and Downtown Erie.
- The artists have been tasked with developing designs that are aesthetically pleasing, visually engaging, and communicate aspects of Erie's past and present identity.



49 students from East Middle School participated in Forbidden by Definition.



## Heritage Trail Public Art Example

In 2016, graphic designer Karen Kurycki was commissioned by the Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville to produce designs that communicated Jacksonville's historic contributions to the arts and entertainment, particularly in the field of music. These designs were installed on utility boxes in the city's entertainment district.



## Capacity Building: Grantmaking

### Why these grants matter:

- As a regional partner of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Erie Arts & Culture distributes Pennsylvania Partners in the Arts (PPA) project and program grants. This state funding benefits communities in Erie, Crawford, Warren, Venango, and Mercer counties.
- Erie Arts & Culture also manages the Erie Arts Endowment, which benefits communities in Erie, Crawford, and Warren counties.
- Our agency's grantmaking efforts support both small arts-based projects and recurring community programs.
- Without these funds, our service region would not have the high number of arts activities and events that directly contribute to our region's quality of life.

## Grantmaking: By the numbers

Community applicants funded during the 2019-2020 grant cycle:

**33** via Erie Arts Endowment

**62** via PPA

### Grantee Highlight:

- Keystone Academics, Athletics & Arts Development Organization (KA3DO) has served the City of Erie since 2014. The organization started as a youth sports organization, utilizing opportunities to participate in organized youth sports to shape and build the life skills of the area's youth population. The scope of the organization has grown to include the 3 A's - Academics, Arts, and Athletics for both youth and adults. In partnership with J&J Productions, KA3DO strives to promote a love for theater, bring the arts to the African American community, and continue creating original staged productions that focus on relevant cultural issues and concerns. The two organizations hope to inspire under-resourced young adults and teens to use their creative talents on stage.
- Thou Shall Not Judge, the third installment of a theatrical trilogy written by playwright Jermaine Beason, was performed on February 15 at Strong Vincent Middle School.
- Based on elements of his own life, Jermaine hopes that sharing through theatre his personal experiences as a survivor of abuse will empower the community to report issues, and simultaneously view the arts as a conduit for critical conversations and social change.



"I was really moved by the interactions. Many of these students are no strangers to loss. They leaned in when the artists told them about overcoming tragedy. The students also experienced that art is a bridge to understanding culture, and can be a path to a new life."

- Kelly Armor, Folk and Traditional Arts Director

## Preserving Diverse Cultures: Folk & Traditional Arts Residencies

**Goals: Amplify Unheard Voices, Identify and develop diverse artists**

New American Artists Share Personal Stories and Culture

Eight artists from Iraq, Bosnia, Syria, Guinea, and Sierra Leone shared their lived experiences and art with middle and high school students in the City of Erie's Alternative Education Program. Funded by a grant from the Doris Duke Foundation, this project helps artists gain experience in presenting their art to a wider audience. Some artists spoke frankly of the civil wars that drove them to flee to the U.S. as refugees.

Students were provided hands-on opportunities to try painting, wood burning, calligraphy, African drumming, sewing, making hummus, and translating a Bosnian pop song.

"It is so important to know how to tell your story. Not only did these artists open my students up to completely different cultures, they showed how powerful a life story can be."

- Dennis Williams, Program Supervisor, Bridges Alternative Education Program.

"It was amazing. I was so happy to do this project. This was the first time for me to be an artist in a school. I discovered I have patience and can communicate with young people how to make art." - Ghadah Hussein, an Iraqi visual artist.

## A message from George Espy, Board Chair

Until recently, NW PA's arts sector was alive and vibrant. Traveling most anywhere in the region, you could find choral or drama groups performing, artists exhibiting their work, and musicians entertaining at a coffee shop, bar, or restaurant. Yet, because of social distancing requirements to combat COVID-19, almost all of this has come to a screeching halt.

Erie in particular is uniquely blessed - a community of our size usually does not have the number of cultural assets and amenities that we do, including major arts organizations, smaller arts programmers, galleries and gift shops, after school and instructional arts-based programs for youth, and institutions of higher education that offer arts degrees. Our community is home to a high number of visual artists, musicians, dancers, thespians, writers, skilled artisans, and creatives working in other artistic or craft disciplines. As an agency, Erie Arts & Culture plays a significant role in cultivating the continued

growth of the sector. As capacity builders, we provide resources to individuals and organizations comprising the sector. Some of these resources include direct funding for arts-based projects and programming that directly contribute to the region's quality of life.

As you can see from this quarterly report, we are very intentional with our programs and services, which is providing more of an impact in our community than ever before. We respectfully ask you to please help us support the sector during this difficult time. Your one-time or sustaining contribution will help us ensure that the sector weathers this storm and flourishes in new ways. And in return, you will know that you have played an important role in making NW PA an attractive place to live, visit, or relocate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
George E. Espy

# 100% of your gift positively impacts our region

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Positive  
**Impact**

