



E·C·G·R·A
ERIE COUNTY GAMING REVENUE AUTHORITY

**EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR'S
REPORT
FOR
JANUARY
2025**



ECGRA Communications Services Report

December 2024 Comms.

BiWeekly Meeting with ECGRA Executive Director

Ongoing Social Media Management

Ongoing Consulting

IMPLEMENTED

December social media posts
8 new graphics scheduled in Dec.
BiWeekly planning meeting with Executive Director
EOY Recap Newsletter

IN PROGRESS

Holiday Graphics
Brand guide updates - #ECGRAworks content from grant recipients
Lead Assets Event
Little Explorers Op-Ed

IN PLANNING

Event planning /scheduling (First Assent, Lead Assets, Grant Workshops)





Strategic Planning Committee Meeting and Grant Review

Thursday, January 9, 2025
11:03am – 1:00pm
5240 Knowledge Parkway
Erie, PA 16510

Zoom Link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85369921522>

AGENDA

1. Special Events Clarification
2. Childcare Initiative Update
3. Multi-Municipal Collaboration Application - West County Paramedics
4. Community Centers Grant Review
5. Good of the Order

ERIE ARTS AND CULTURE

NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA'S ARTS COUNCIL

419 State St. Erie, PA 16501
erieartsandculture.org
(814) 452-3427

Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road, Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

Date: 12/19/2024
Amount: \$44,427.06

Dear Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority,

Thanks to you, Erie Arts & Culture is able to elevate, inspire, and connect artists and organizations, leveraging the transformative power of the arts and humanities, addressing vital needs and interests in Erie and Northwestern Pennsylvania. Your support helps us:

- Provide over \$219,000 in grants to artists, creative entrepreneurs, and arts organizations in Northwest Pennsylvania, supporting their growth and sustainability.
- Expand community awareness of folk and traditional artists, preserving our local heritage for future generations while increasing access to essential resources for culture bearers.
- Strengthen regional networks, establishing EAC as a central hub for artists, arts organizations, and creative entrepreneurs to enhance visibility and access to resources.
- Increase the number of artist residencies across the region, supporting continued learning and growth for people of all ages and abilities. This year, we facilitated 41 residencies in NWPA, and with your support, we aim to do even more.

On behalf of our staff and Board, I extend our heartfelt gratitude for your generous donation. Your contribution empowers us to continue our mission with utmost dedication. We are truly grateful for your support and look forward to a lasting relationship with you at Erie Arts and Culture.

Warm regards,



Casey Corritore
Interim Executive Director

Erie Arts & Culture is a registered name of the Arts Council of Erie. Official registration and financial information can be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free 1-800-732-0999. This letter serves as a formal acknowledgement of your contribution. Arts Council of Erie, a 501 (c)(3) not for profit organization, has not provided any goods or services, in whole or in part, to the above for this voluntary cash contribution. If the above wishes to claim tax deductibility of this gift in the U.S., please retain this acknowledgement letter.

Tax ID number is 25-6085617.



Erie Art Museum

20 East 5th Street • Erie, PA 16507

December 30, 2024

Perry Wood
Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road
Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

Dear Perry,

The Erie Art Museum has received \$31,858.02 from the Erie County Lead Asset Endowment fund for our general operations. On behalf of everyone who benefits from our programming, we thank you for this valuable support.

2024 has been a year of growth at the Museum, with more educational offerings, additional programming, several new exhibits, and a couple of significant gifts to help us begin the much-needed renovations to the historic Customs House. We've seen an increase in our membership and visitor numbers and look forward to continuing that trend in the coming year.

I invite you, Tom, Tammi, and the ECGRA board of directors to participate in a private tour of the Erie Art Museum. Please let me know some potential dates, and we'll schedule this. That will be an excellent way to see the ECGRA funds at work.

All the best,

Melanie Vadzemnieks, CFRE
Development Director
Erie Art Museum
melanie.vadzemnieks@erieartmuseum.org
814.459.5477



Erie Art Museum

814-459-5477 • www.erieartmuseum.org

St. Ann's Campus Enhancement: Phase 1 is Complete!

The St. Ann's Campus of Sarah Reed, housing the SELF and SBLP programs, has been undergoing a significant transformation since Summer 2022 as part of the **St. Ann's Campus Enhancement: Phase 1** project. As of June 2024, this phase is officially complete thanks to our successful fundraising campaign that raised **\$600,000** needed to complete the improvements below! The process has included an incredible amount of effort on the part of our development team, Gary Bukowski *AVP of Development* and Stephenie Bojc *Development Coordinator*, along with our dedicated maintenance team, St. Ann's staff, IT and operations team and numerous external vendors and donors.

IT INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES

CLASSROOM & CAMPUS EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES

- 116 STUDENT DESKS & CHAIRS
- 11 CHERRY BOOKCASES
- 10 MAGNETIC WHITEBOARDS
- 10 NATURAL CORKBOARDS
- 14 BOARD ROOM CHAIRS
- 3 OFFICE DESKS & 7 OFFICE CHAIRS
- 4 STUDENT & STAFF ACTIVITY TABLES
- 6 SMARTTVS (50") FOR CLASSROOMS
- 6 MICROSCOPES & SLIDE KITS
- 1 STORAGE SHED FOR GARDEN & MAINTENANCE EQUIPMENT
- SENSORY ROOM
- NEW BOOKS FOR THE ST. ANN'S LIBRARY
- PERSONAL HYGIENE ITEMS FOR THE STUDENTS

TECHNOLOGY

- 25 HP PROBOOK 450 G9 15.6" NOTEBOOKS + 75" SMART TV
- 3 PROMETHEAN SMARTBOARDS W/STAND & CART

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

- NORTH GYM ROOF & MAIN ROOF
- HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING
- EXTERIOR REPOINTING & IMPROVEMENTS

SUMMER PROGRAM 2022



PHASE 1 TOTAL: \$600,000

Special Thanks to Our **Phase 1 Donors** Who Made These Improvements Possible!

- Bob & Betsy Guelcher Fund at the Residential & St. Ann's Campuses
- Books-a-Million
- Britton Family Foundation
- C.A. Curtze Co.
- City of Erie Grant through the American Rescue Plan
- **Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority**
- Erie Insurance
- ERIEBANK
- The Estate of Frances Buseck
- Gordon & Marti Gehrlein
- Gifts in Memory of Lori Eaton
- Gifts in Memory of Gloria Hosford
- Gifts in Memory of Janet Cuthbert Sesler
- Nick & Chris Iwig
- Knox Law
- Henry A. & Mary J. MacDonald Foundation
- PA Department of Community & Economic Development
- Presque Isle Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution
- Redevelopment Authority of the City of Erie
- Rite Aid Healthy Futures
- School Specialty
- UPMC Health Plan
- The Woman's Club of Erie
- Elena Zaitsoff



Thank you!

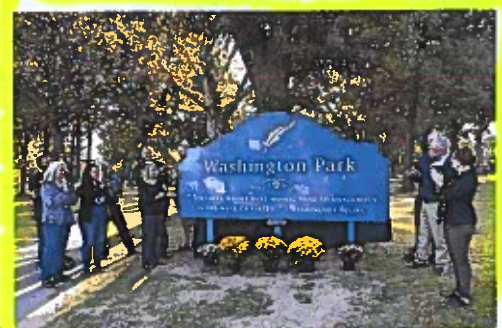
Thrive in Erie Graduation

Thanks to the financial support of **Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA)** and **PNC Foundation**, SSJNN sponsored 6 businesses within our footprint to participate in the yearlong **Thrive in Erie** entrepreneurial program from **Paramount Pursuits**. Businesses ranged from food service to childcare to custom graphic design. A special shout out to **The Shop at 19th and Chestnut** for hosting this special graduation event with friends, families, and neighbors.



Neighborhood Groups

This year, we supported three active neighborhood groups, **Eastside Neighborhood Association**, **Central City Neighborhood Association**, and **Historic Little Italy Wellness Group**, which meet to share information, resources, and good company. With funding from **Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA)**, we also helped neighbors create a beautiful new sign welcoming visitors to Washington Park. These groups foster leadership, address local issues, and educate members on best practices for neighborhood strengthening. By empowering individuals and encouraging collaboration, we're helping create more connected neighborhoods.



Advertisement

County Executive Davis facing another lawsuit

A.J.

Rao

Erie Times-News USA TODAY NETWORK

Erie County Executive Brenton Davis has been a frequent critic of the county's Gaming Revenue Authority and Diverse Erie commission.

But a recent directive by Davis has taken that criticism to another level, with some county and legal officials calling the action a blatant violation of the separation of powers.

Here's what to know.

Davis demands return of ARP funds

Earlier this week, Davis sent letters to ECGRA and Diverse Erie, urging them to return their unspent pandemic-era American Rescue Plan money to the county by Monday.

ECGRA and Diverse Erie entered into ARP agreements with the county in 2021 and received \$4 million and \$3.5 million in ARP funds, respectively.

Both used the funds to help communities bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic, awarding grants to minority-owned small businesses, nonprofits and community facilities, among others.

The two entities have just under

\$400,000 remaining in unspent ARP funds.

Davis said he wants that money back and cited a clause in the ARP grantee agreement that states the county can terminate the agreement "for convenience," and require all unspent or unawarded funds to be returned.

A "convenience" clause is a contractual provision that allows one party to end a contract without cause or penalty.

Erie County Public Information Officer Chris Carroll said the administration intends to use the returned funds to support disaster relief efforts related to the recent lake-effect snow disaster.

Carroll said the decision to reclaim the ARP funds was motivated by "serious concerns" about transparency, accountability and the proper management of public funds by ECGRA and Diverse Erie.

"The county taxpayer is ultimately responsible for repaying the U.S. Treasury if these funds are misspent," he said. "It is our intention to protect the taxpayer and recall this money so that we can reduce any further risk."

Diverse Erie Chief Administrative Officer Gary Lee declined to comment on the matter before speaking with the commission board and solicitor.

The ECGRA board, however, is preparing to sue the administration.

ECGRA solicitor to file lawsuit, says Davis claims are ‘inaccurate’

Erie County Council recently approved an additional \$2.5 million in ARP funds to ECGRA to address the county’s childcare crisis. Davis vetoed the line item — he didn’t want ECGRA to administer the funds — but council overrode the veto on Dec. 6.

Despite the approval, Davis has refrained from negotiating a new ARP grant agreement with ECGRA, claiming ECGRA is still not compliant with U.S. Treasury reporting requirements for its initial \$4 million ARP allocation.

In a letter sent Wednesday to the ECGRA board, Davis laid out three “conditions” that would allow for a new ARP grant agreement: Firstly, ECGRA must provide a complete report of all expenditures related to the \$4 million; the county must then review and approve it to confirm compliance; and finally, ECGRA must abide by the grant termination notice and return any remaining funds to the county by Monday. Until those conditions are met, the county “cannot, in good conscience, negotiate a new grant agreement,” Davis said regarding the additional \$2.5 million.

ECGRA Solicitor Tim Wachter argued that contracting with an entity is a “ministerial duty” for the county executive and that once Erie County Council appropriates money to an entity, the executive is “obligated to go make it happen.”

Wachter said Davis’ “conditions” were not required by federal regulations or the initial ARP contract and were merely an additional way for him to “frustrate the power” of Erie County Council.

As such, the ECGRA board on Thursday unanimously agreed to authorize Wachter to file a lawsuit against the county in the Erie County Court of Common Pleas. The lawsuit, a mandamus action, seeks to ensure the county performs its ministerial obligation to contract with ECGRA and fulfill council’s appropriation of the \$2.5 million.

Wachter also noted that Davis does not have the “independent unilateral authority” to terminate an agreement because Erie County Council appropriated the ARP money for a specific purpose.

“To allow for that to occur would be to frustrate the specific appropriation made by Erie County Council,” Wachter said. “It violates the spirit and likely also the letter of the Erie County Home Rule Charter and the separation of powers doctrine that is incorporated therein.”

Council Councilman Rock Copeland, who serves as finance committee chairman, echoed Wachter.

“Brenton Davis’ illegal defiance of council’s authority through bureaucratic obstruction violates his oath and the Home Rule Charter,” he said. “This demands immediate legal action.”

Wachter further said Davis’ correspondence was “inaccurate” and stressed that ECGRA was compliant with U.S. Treasury reporting guidelines. He added that the administration hasn’t provided any evidence that ECGRA is out of compliance.

Administration calls out Diverse Erie

Much of the administration’s evidence deals with Diverse Erie.

Carroll provided email correspondence to the Erie Times-News, revealing how three small businesses that received grants from Diverse Erie in July 2023 had not responded to requests for expense documentation, as of November.

Carroll also showed a Nov. 15 email from Lee in which he stated that the remaining fund balance of Diverse Erie is “fully committed to the commission’s operating budget.”

“The administration will not allow nearly half a million dollars to sit idle, covering salaries and rent, without any efforts being made to establish new grant programs or deliver meaningful impact,” Carroll said.

“The call to return the money is the necessary step to rectify these problems and ensure ARPA dollars are used as intended for the benefit of the community and in compliance with U.S. Treasury guidelines.”

Davis’ directive also requires Diverse Erie to scrap its pending contracts and agreements.

Erie County Council had approved an additional \$1.5 million in ARP funds to Diverse Erie. However, the administration has refused to certify the availability of those funds, placing the commission’s future in limbo.

Wachter, who also serves as Diverse Erie solicitor, said he anticipates the commission, like ECGRA, to similarly push back against Davis’ actions, potentially with legal action.

A.J. Rao can be reached at arao@gannett.com. Follow him on X @ETNRao.

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Advertisement

Why Davis wants two checks at ECGRA's check presentations

A.J. Rao

Erie Times-News USA TODAY NETWORK

Whenever the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority awards a series of grants, a news conference is typically held in which awardees join ECGRA and county officials behind a large ceremonial check.

But starting in 2025, when ECGRA will award \$2.5 million in grants to support child care, the public will notice a separate large check, one that will likely be held by Erie County Executive Brenton Davis, who's intent on having the county — and his administration — also get credit.

The \$2.5 million is from the county's share of federal American Rescue Plan funds and was appropriated by Erie County Council to ECGRA in November. The funds are expected to be matched by \$2.5 million in gaming funds.

During check presentations, Davis wants one check to show the ARP contribution and the other to show the gaming match. The dual checks are not a suggestion but a contractual obligation, one of many Davis injected in ECGRA's new ARP contract to ensure the county is acknowledged.

"I think it's redundant and a little bit petty," ECGRA Executive Director Perry Wood said. "We view ourselves as in partnership with Erie County. We're an Erie County authority — it's in our name."

Wood said he's always acknowledged the county's support at previous check presentations and that the county executive has appeared at several of them.

Davis is nonetheless requiring ECGRA to acknowledge the county's support in news media interviews and in materials, advertisements, social media and mailings related to the ARP contract and grant awards. He also wants the county seal to appear on the large ARP checks.

Wood said the requirements for public acknowledgement were the most contentious part of the negotiations with the Davis administration on the ARP contract.

"We weren't too focused on those issues in the past, but we realized that the county executive's office was focused on those issues," Wood said. "At the end of the day, government is about compromise and cooperation and so we put our feelings aside and we signed the contract."

ECGRA and Davis reach compromise, avert legal showdown

The ECGRA board authorized Wood to sign off on the \$2.5 million ARP contract during a special meeting Thursday, capping a turbulent two weeks between ECGRA and Davis.

The turbulence began when Davis notified ECGRA in a Dec. 9 letter that he wouldn't entertain the new ARP contract until ECGRA returned its remaining ARP funds from a 2021 contract signed by former County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper.

Davis stated in his letter that he terminated that contract and wanted those remaining ARP funds — roughly \$330,000 — to offset snow removal costs incurred during the recent lakeeffect

snowstorm.

Davis also informed ECGRA the county had not received a complete and accurate reporting of expenditures associated with the 2021 contract. Wood told the Erie Times-News on Thursday that the administration couldn't provide any evidence ECGRA was out of compliance with ARP guidelines and that administration officials later admitted to him ECGRA was not out of compliance.

The ECGRA board subsequently authorized its solicitor on Dec. 12 to file a lawsuit against Davis, seeking a court order that would require the county executive to carry out his ministerial duty to fulfill the \$2.5 million appropriation, as approved by Erie County Council.

The lawsuit was averted after ECGRA and the administration finalized a deal shortly before Thursday's meeting.

The deal involves Davis rescinding his termination of the 2021 ARP contract, contingent on ECGRA approving a grant of up to \$500,000 in gaming funds to go toward emergency snow removal costs.

The ECGRA board approved a resolution authorizing the grant Thursday.

The deal included an amendment that would extend the 2021 contract through June 30 and repurpose those funds from professional services to grant awards.

ECGRA Board Chairman Ronald Cleaver told the Erie Times-News he was satisfied with the outcome.

"This could have been resolved without going through all of this rigmarole," he said. "But it's over and done. Everybody's happy. Everybody's satisfied. We'll move on."

Erie County Public Information Officer Chris Carroll could not be immediately reached for comment Thursday.

ECGRA to support childcare facilities, staff

As part of the deal, ECGRA will also remain manager of the \$2.5 million in ARP funds for child care.

The \$2.5 million will be awarded to members of the early childhood development and daycare community throughout the county, with a focus on infrastructure and workforce development.

The grant awards will support the creation and expansion of childcare slots available through Erie County.

The Northwest Institute of Research, an Erie-based nonprofit that operates early learning centers, will make award recommendations to the ECGRA board. The board will have final and independent discretion on all award decisions, according to the contract.

"I'm ecstatic that the daycare community is going to benefit from these funds — that was our goal from Day One," Wood said. "So, whenever we got bogged down in negotiations, I just reminded myself that we were doing this for the working families of Erie County."

A.J. Rao can be reached at arao@gannett.com. Follow him on X @ETNRao.
