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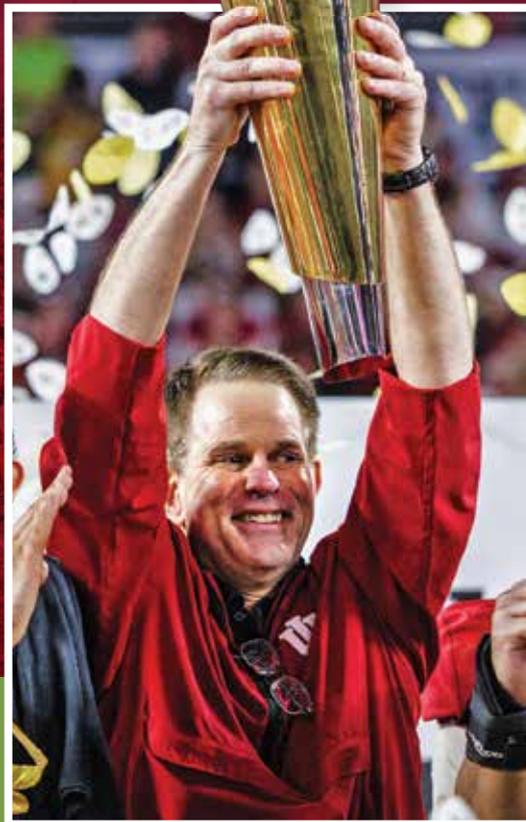
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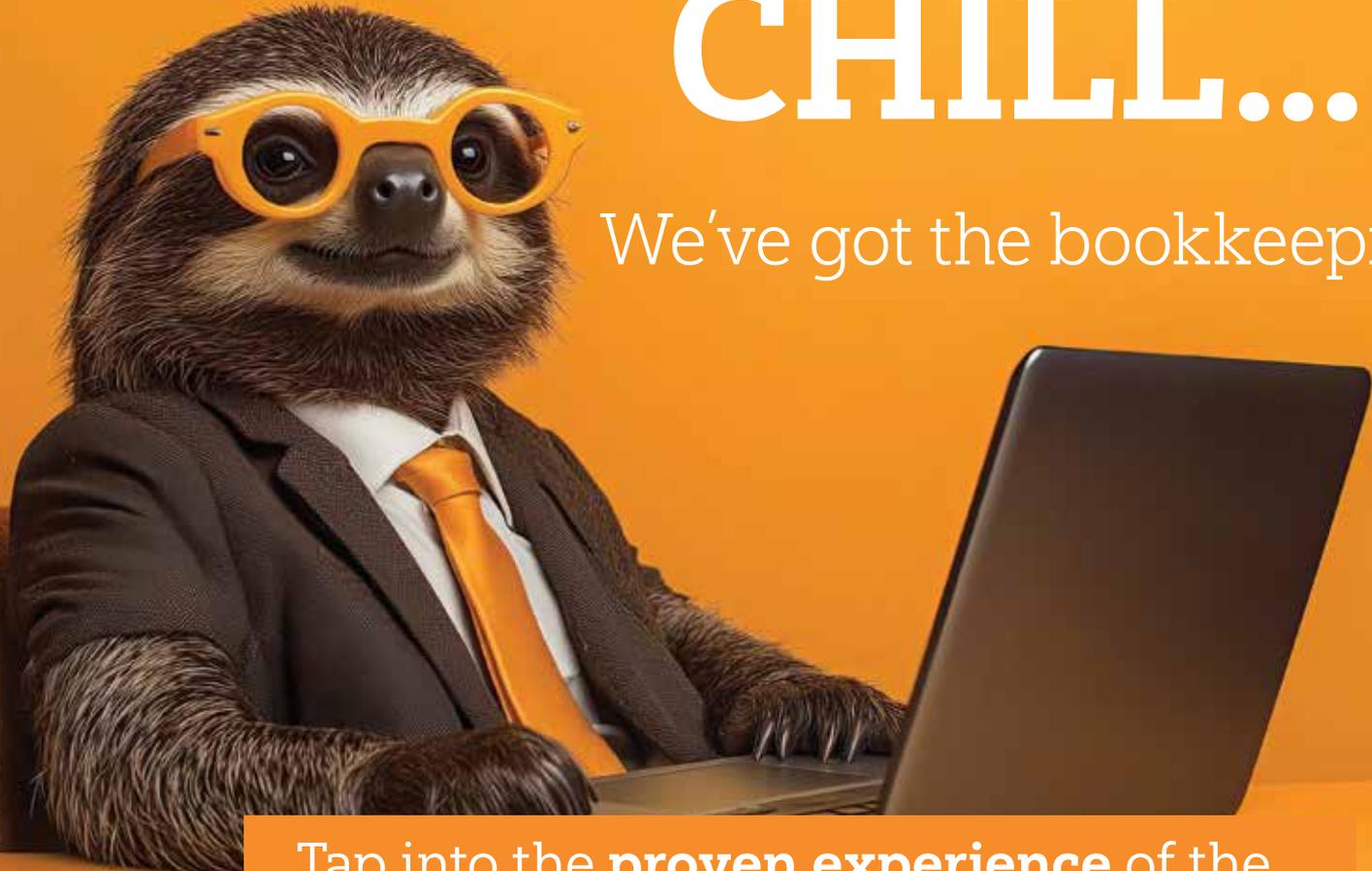
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## features

### 80 IU Wins it All! The Greatest Season in College Football History

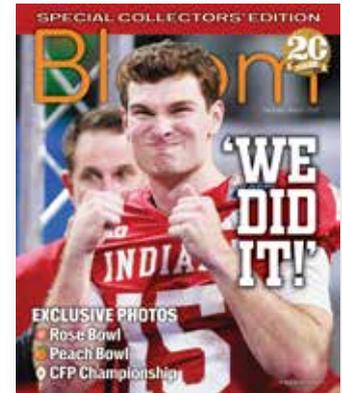
Entering the 2025 season, Indiana was college football's all-time leader in losses. Now, Hoosier Nation is roaring following Indiana's legendary 16-0 run to win the CFP championship under second-year head coach Curt Cignetti. Relive the Hoosiers' playoff run with this photo feature.

*By Jeremy Price, photography by Jeremy Hogan*

### 90 Despite Troubled Times, Jewish Theatre Thrives

Since its inception 20 years ago, Jewish Theatre Bloomington has focused on universal issues and the human condition. It presents plays that are relatable to a diverse audience, with themes that have one common thread: Each play has a connection to Jewish life.

*By Brittany Marshall*



*Photo by Jeremy Hogan*

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A retired tourism marketer who joined the Peace Corps and has been living in Kyrgyzstan, and the "Bloomerang" who returned to town in 2021 to found a new high tech business are Bloomingtonians worth knowing.

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She's 92, he's 88. She was a singer, he was a drummer, both touring the country with different big bands. When their paths finally crossed, they fell in love and have been married for 63 years; and check out our Q & A with the anonymous creator of the local satire zine *Shut Yer Pie Hole!*

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The Bloomington Farm Stop Collective is a daily, year-round farmers' market cooperative and café providing locally sourced food and other products to the community.

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Located on the southwest side of Bloomington, Simply Primitive is an independently owned home goods store selling a wide variety of candles, art, furniture, olive oils, goat milk products, and more.

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The executive director of Indiana University's Kinsey Institute—and the chief scientific advisor to match.com—has published a new book, *The Intimate Animal* (Little, Brown Spark); and our health columnist goes all-in on death and dying.

### 50 Home/Family

The Monroe County Master Gardeners Association's annual Garden Fair will be held at Switchyard Park on April 11; and in the "Autism & Disability Journal," Adria Nassim explains why she isn't fond of the term "self-advocate."

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A local nonprofit has been helping women in Pakistan secure jobs and support their families by teaching them to sew; and the Bloomington Amateur Radio Association not only helps foster communication between individuals around the globe, but is prepared to assist locally in case of an emergency.

### 62 Community

*Saving the Hoosier* is a documentary film being produced locally about efforts to protect the Hoosier National Forest from the federal government's renewed attempt to allow more than 5,000 acres to be logged.



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## Goodbye 2025

2025 was quite a year for the nation, the state, and for IU.

**On the bright side**, how about those Hoosiers!

Curt Cignetti, Fernando Mendoza, and the crew shocked the sports world. Best hire, best quarterback, best coach, best team, best season in IU history.

**On the dark side**, IU made news as just about the worst university in the country in terms of free speech. It ranked 255th out of 257 schools and last among all public universities in the College Free Speech Rankings.

**On the bright side, maybe**, it appears President Pam Whitten and the Board of Trustees may finally have gotten the message after making a litany of bad “free speech” decisions that have darkened IU’s reputation. Whitten has asked the University Faculty Council to review the University of Chicago’s “Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression,” commonly known as the Chicago Principles, to advise on whether IU should adopt those principles.

**On the dark side**, IU closed its diversity, equity, and inclusion office under pressure from new federal and state mandates targeting DEI-aligned policies, programs, and entities.

Shocking that Whitten acquiesced so easily since she had been an avowed DEI advocate. Here’s what she told *Bloom Magazine* in the December 2021/January 2022 issue:

*“Issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion have been very important to me for a very long time at all the institutions that I have worked at, and so at IU I will say that I think there has been the right intent for a while. People are very vested, and so it’s nice to come to an institution where this is such a value to so many people.”*

Well, not anymore, apparently.

**On the bright side** In Indianapolis, 21 Republican senators voted against a redistricting plan that might have given their party two more seats in the midterm elections. Resisting pressure from President Trump (an invite to the White House) and Vice President J.D. Vance (two visits to Indy), the brave 21 cited overwhelming public opposition to redistricting. Some even mentioned it would be improper to further gerrymander now for political purposes. Trump has since threatened to primary the 21 senators and to cut off all funding to the state.

Fortunately, he’s been distracted by Venezuela, Greenland, Iran, Jerome Powell, multiple ICE murders, and the Epstein files. It was quite a year.

**Malcolm Abrams**  
editor@magbloom.com

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by Jim Sims  
President, Monroe County Branch NAACP  
Former At-Large Bloomington City Council member (August 2017–December 2023)

## The Fierce Urgency of Now!

Last November 2025, the Monroe County NAACP’s Freedom Fund Banquet, our sold-out annual fundraiser, welcomed approximately 160 like-minded community members who support the mission of our organization. We are fortunate to reside in a county/city where allies and advocates actively support the elimination of racial discrimination while promoting fair treatment of all people as legally authorized by the U.S. Constitution. Regrettably, some in our country do not fully recognize those authorized rights.

“The Fierce Urgency of Now” was the 2025 theme of the National NAACP and is a call to action to mobilize, strategize, and organize against the racist policies and actions of all three branches of government.

The mission of the NAACP is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination. Since the creation of our country, we know that Black people, other minorities, and marginalized populations, historically, have not been treated fairly, so our work remains rooted in racial equity, civic engagement, and supportive policies and institutions for all people. It is important to understand that the NAACP is nonpartisan ... but not apolitical. We practice non-violence in our tactics and activism, but we have a right to defend ourselves when assaulted or attacked.

We know that no social ills or wrongs will ever be resolved if we, as a society, can’t talk and reason with one another safely. Nor if we can’t depend on our elected representatives, our court system, or our executive branch of government to protect our constitutional rights through rule-of-law enforcements. Having a free democracy requires us to push back whenever laws, rules, institutions, or even executive orders strip citizens of their rights or silences their voices.

Hope. The hope of better days ahead. The hope that all people will be treated fairly and equitably. The hope of opportunity. Keeping hope alive is the driving force of constant long-term activism, even when progress seems most dire. We will never lose hope, and our work continues. We do, however, have serious concerns with a multitude of issues that must be addressed and resolved urgently.

We push back and protest the illegal expansion of presidential powers that are legislative responsibilities. We push back on federal representatives for not extending Affordable Care Act credits and subsidies past the end of 2025, which could cause nearly 4 million people to lose their health care coverage and more than 20 million to have their premiums increase an average of 75%–100%. We pushed back on redrawing voting district maps here in Indiana, which could have disenfranchised the voices and representation of Black voters, especially in areas with large Black and minority populations. We push back on federal-level attacks on the free press, the judiciary, and legislators who are critical of federal policies and actions. We push back on a president who is divisive, racist, homophobic, and misogynistic toward citizens. We did not elect a king or a dictator.

Much like politics, we believe the work seeking equity for all people begins locally. We have worked tirelessly to establish relationships, partnerships, and liaisons with other local organizations, groups, and individuals who believe social justice for all is a strong community value. Collaborating resources and shared values provide a strong front to fight injustices and unfair practices.

To quote Maya Angelou, “We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike.”

Let’s talk frankly and purposely, my friends! Keep hope alive! ✨

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# Memories of Charlotte

## Readers Share Stories of Charlotte Zietlow, Who Died November 5, 2025

I had heard many wonderful things about Charlotte since moving to Bloomington in 1999. I had also seen quite a few pictures of her, so when I attended the No Kings protest in June it was a most pleasant surprise to actually meet her in person! Here is my pic.

**DON WATERS**

Having lived in Green Acres neighborhood for many years, we were treated to Charlotte canvassing to get out the vote for some 35 years.

We enjoyed her visits, not knowing much about her

except that she lived in our neighborhood and always wore a beautiful hat and a delightful smile. One particular warm summer day, Charlotte appeared at our door, and although we were delighted to see her, I told her she shouldn't feel bothered to always come to our house. Her response was I know you and your husband are avid voters but I just like to come chat because you are so much fun to talk to! Here we were honored The Grand Dame of Bloomington came to us because we were fun to talk to! I will always remember that and that she remembered our names every time she saw us anywhere in town.

**AGGIE SARKISSIAN**

It all began with a phone call just days after I began my new job as coordinator of the GLB Center at IU. The call came from Charlotte Zietlow, who wanted to congratulate me. We scheduled a time to meet, and the visit was an absolute delight. She spoke of her long-time advocacy for gay issues, her work with the City, and her Lutheran background. It was the start of a beautiful friendship. That was followed by visits in her home and years of work together with Bloomington United.



Charlotte Zietlow at the "No Kings!" protest on June 14, 2025. Photo by Don Waters

Following a stroke, there were regular visits in her care facility and weekly conversations in her new apartment. Another phone call from Charlotte years later informed me that she had nominated me for the coveted Rotary Award. Ongoing conversations and wonderful visits would enrich my life in so many ways as I continued to fall in love with this amazing woman all of Bloomington knew as Charlotte Zietlow.

**DOUGLAS E. BAUDER**

Charlotte and I lived in the same building toward the end of her life. She moved in shortly after I did in September 2019 after being discharged from rehab. Shortly before she arrived, my mother told me, "Look after Charlotte," so I did.

Every morning, I would bring her newspaper up from the mailroom and leave it at her door. Mr. T [my service dog] many times would help do this himself and there would occasionally be a note on her door: "Today's paper is brought to you by The Talented Mr. T. Have a 'T' Riffic day!" She would also send me on errands and pay me in Lindor truffles. Mr. T. was paid in reminders of what a good boy he was. She adored us both.

**ADRIA NASSIM**

In 2014, we moved to Bloomington and rented a house across the street from Charlotte and her husband, Paul. The day we moved in, Charlotte visited us to introduce herself and to welcome us to the neighborhood. Before she left on her first visit, Charlotte told us that she was going to make dinner for us and our two young children. More importantly, she completed

her primary mission. She helped us complete voter registration forms and took them with her to make sure that they were submitted!

**ADAM AND CARRIE FUDICKAR**

When I was in my 20's, I worked for Charlotte at Goods Inc. Charlotte decided that I should teach a cooking class at the store. (One of Charlotte's many qualities was that she could convince people to do things outside of their comfort zone. She was able to do this because we knew that she would be there to catch us if we fell.) Anyway, I reluctantly said I would do it.

Surprise, surprise, the schedule came out and, with no prior discussion, I read the class description with the dishes I was to prepare and teach to adults (I was just a kid!). It was to be an Easter baking and dessert class and one of the items was homemade marshmallow peeps. Up until that moment, I had not even considered that Peeps could be made outside of a factory—yikes, I was terrified.



(l-r) Lynn Schwartzberg at Charlotte's 89th birthday party. Courtesy photo

This was the 1980's and I had no choice but to head to the IU Library and study everything [about peeps]. Well, I taught the class and I made adorable little marshmallow peeps. I went on to teach at Goods Inc. as well as Kitchen Art in West Lafayette. I taught for decades at both stores and gave talks on food and gave demonstrations around Indiana for many years.

Yes, all thanks to Charlotte. She gave me confidence and had my back since those days, 45 years of having the best support system anyone could ever want.

**LYNN SCHWARTZBERG**



Lee Williams  
Courtesy photo

## Lotus Festival Founder Lee Williams Dies at Age 68

Lee Williams, co-founder and longtime executive director of the Lotus World Music and Arts Festival, died January 11, 2026, at age 68. In a tribute to Williams published in *The Herald-Times* on January 16, Andy Graham, a former *H-T* reporter and close friend of Williams, wrote how Williams “filled his beloved adopted hometown with song during a dazzling, decades-long career in music promotion” and through the Lotus Festival.

Graham described Williams as “a pinball wizard, a euchre savant, a collector of brass rubbings, a loyal IU Hoosier fan, a lover of Golden Retrievers, a happy lover of life and a devoted partner to his wife of 40 years, Carol Simmons.”

Williams was born August 6, 1957, in New Albany Indiana. In addition to his wife, survivors include his sister, Dena Williams; a nephew, David Lugo, and a niece, Susan Nicole “Nikki” Lugo-Floro.” A celebration of life will take place at a later date.



Niki Washburn models a David Ebbinghouse design. Photo by Rodney Margison

## Submissions open for 2026 Trashion/Refashion Runway Show

The 2026 Bloomington Trashion/Refashion Runway Show is now accepting design entries, model applications, and volunteer requests for its 17th annual event to be held Sunday, April 12, at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater. The deadline for entries is Sunday, February 16.

The show invites creators to submit unique designs crafted from at least 90% previously owned materials that have been transformed from their original state, breathing new life into forgotten items and saving them from landfills. Trashion designs should “imagine couture born from the unexpected,” created from items not related to fabric or garments. Refashion designs should rework traditional fabrics and garments into contemporary, wearable pieces.

In addition, models of all ages, sizes, and experience levels are invited to participate, as are volunteer planners, hair and makeup artists, and ushers. Learn more and apply at [bloomingtontrashion.org](http://bloomingtontrashion.org).



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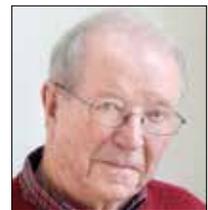
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## The Rev. Dr. Joe G. Emerson Dead at Age 94

Evansville, Indiana, native the Rev. Dr. Joe G. Emerson died Friday, January 9, 2025, in Bloomington. Born October 30, 1931, Pastor Emerson was 94. He had a 40-year career in ministry with United

Methodist churches throughout Indiana, including Connersville, Columbus, Carmel, and Bloomington, where he helped found St. Mark’s United Methodist Church. He also was one of the founders of the Shalom Center (now Beacon) and continued raising money for the organization until his death.

In March 1965, Pastor Emerson joined his friend and colleague the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for one of the Pettus Bridge crossings in Selma, Alabama. In every community where he lived he was involved in social justice issues, helping to integrate public schools in Connersville, working to found Volunteers in Medicine in Columbus, and serving on the Board of Global Ministries and various human rights commissions. ✨



Joe Emerson.  
Photo by Lynae Sowinski

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# OurTown<sup>☆</sup>

"In our town, **we like to know** the facts about everybody." —Thornton Wilder, *Our Town*

## Kim Gray Peace Corps Volunteer

by Janet Mandelstam

When 67-year-old Kimberly Gray saw that the Peace Corps was recruiting for eco-tourism marketing specialists, she knew that she was a good fit for the role.

The Bloomington native applied, was accepted, and soon will be winding up a two-year assignment in Kyrgyzstan, the former Soviet republic in Central Asia. In email and Zoom interviews from Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital, Gray explained her decision to join the Peace Corps and the nature of her work in Kryrgyzstan.

Having recently left a job, she says she was "exploring ways to get back into the tourism marketing sector," where she had spent most of her career. She remembered hearing about a friend's father who had served in the Peace Corps after retiring, "and I made a mental note that this would likely be something I'd want to do later in my career. I went to the Peace Corps website for the first time ever in 2023."

### Language Studies at IU

Kimberly Gray was able to study the Kyrgyz language in Bloomington because Indiana University is a leader in foreign language education. IU's website lists 82 languages taught there, which IU says is more than any other university in the United States. Central Eurasian Studies has been offered since the early 1960s.

That was the time of the Cold War, and the U.S. government realized how little Americans knew about the republics of the Soviet Union. In response, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act to support the teaching of non-western languages. Indiana recruited Denis Sinor, a professor at University of Cambridge in England and one of the world's leading scholars of Central Asia, to establish a new program that taught the languages spoken from Eastern Europe to the Pacific. The program soon expanded to include the history and culture of the countries as well, and Bloomington became the destination for Central Eurasian studies.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, interest in former republics like Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan has greatly increased. Today the Department of Central Eurasian Studies is housed in the Hamilton Lugar School of International Studies. The department website offers courses in 12 languages from Estonian to Uzbek, Kurdish to Persian, and more. Several of the courses are available online to non-IU students. —Janet Mandelstam



As one of seven volunteers sent to Kyrgyzstan, Kim Gray (center) was assigned to work with the Kyrgyz Community Based Tourism Association in Bishkek. Courtesy photo

What Gray found were the new eco-tourism positions. Because the program was so new, it was operating only in Kyrgyzstan. "I was in the very first cohort recruited for this role in the Peace Corps," Gray says. One of seven volunteers sent to the country, she was assigned to work with the Kyrgyz Community Based Tourism Association in Bishkek.

"The country," she says, "is 95% mountains and is home to the second largest saltwater body of water in the world." The program works to grow tourism by developing resorts, promote trekking, and other initiatives. Gray helped to update a travel guide to Kyrgyzstan published in Britain.

"The Kyrgyz people," Gray says, "are so gracious. They open up their houses and yurts. "

One of the goals of the program, she says, "is to develop tourism in rural communities so the people can make a living through tourism."

English is spoken in the office, but Gray had the opportunity to audit a class in the Kyrgyz language at Indiana University before going abroad. IU has a long history of offering courses in Central Asian languages.

Before joining the Peace Corps, Gray, who holds an M.B.A. from IU's Kelley School of Business, was active in the Bloomington community, supporting the Lotus World Music & Arts Festival, Rotary Club, and United Way of Monroe County, among other organizations.

When her work in Kryrgyzstan ends in mid-March, She plans to travel to Thailand, "return to Bishkek for final goodbyes," and then fly home to Bloomington. ✧

# Ravi Bhatt

## IT Entrepreneur



Ravi Bhatt enjoys reinventing himself and mastering new industries and careers.

He arrived at Indiana University as a biology major but graduated with a degree in cognitive and computer science, later being recognized as a Distinguished Alumni by the program. He considered attending medical school or becoming a researcher but instead decided to pursue a law degree from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

He then went into communication strategy consulting for complex cases in high-stakes litigation and was set to become a lawyer at a large firm, but he pivoted again.

Embracing tech entrepreneurship in 2010, Bhatt briefly considered a move to Bloomington but chose Chicago as a more savvy environment. A decade later, Bhatt was between business opportunities and paid his college town visit. “It was a great day—had a good ice cream cone, the sun was on my back,” he recalls. Returning home, he asked his wife, Ami, about moving to Bloomington with their two young children—Kavir and Vina. “Bloomington felt like a good place to raise a family,” Bhatt says.

“Even from my office in the Trades District, walking to campus is just a few minutes, the [downtown] Square is right

In 2021, Bhatt founded Folia, a software company specializing in digital annotation solutions.

*Photo by Martin Boling*

there. It changes the experience for all of us.”

It was also a business decision. “Sometimes a decade makes a big difference. When I came back again, I saw the fledgling Mill, met Pat East [executive director at the time] and the folks—it was exciting,” says Bhatt, and it represented another chance to redefine his career.

The result was founding Bloomington-based Folia in 2021, a software company specializing in digital annotation solutions. “We needed a digital equivalent of what we did in the paper world—write notes in the margins,” Bhatt said.

Now Folia’s iAnnotate app is used by more than one million people every day in a variety of settings including banks, law firms, and government agencies. In November, Folia became the first tenant in The Forge, the new 22,000-square-foot office building in Bloomington’s Trades District.

Giving back to some of the organizations that helped him succeed in Bloomington, Bhatt has served on the boards of IU Ventures, TechPoint, IU’s College of Arts and Sciences, and The Mill, and he continues to diversify his knowledge and goals. —Jeremy Price

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# She Was a Singer in the Band, He Played Drums And They Fell in Love

by Linda Margison

Dorothy and Don Stejskal followed each other from one ballroom to the next for several years, her as a singer with the Russ Carlyle Orchestra and him playing drums for the Don Glasser Orchestra. But their paths never crossed.

"She ziggled, and I zagged," Don says of their early days performing at venues like Roseland Dance City in New York City and the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans. "Until the Aragon Ballroom [in Chicago]."

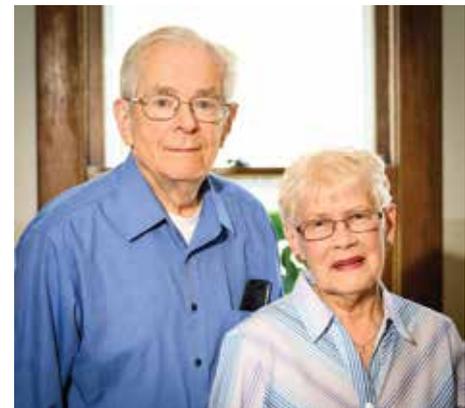
The night they finally met in the early 1960s, Don and Dorothy were both with

Norm Ladd's band when Dorothy needed a ride home.

"I just remember him holding my arm as we were going down the stairs in the Aragon Ballroom, and I thought, 'He's so gentle,' not my type at all," 92-year-old Dorothy chatters.



(above) Before quitting to get married, Dorothy sang and served cocktails for six months at the Gaslight Club in Chicago, which Don compared to the Playboy Club; (left) Dorothy performed as a vocalist with the Russ Carlyle Orchestra before joining Norm Ladd's band, where she met Don. *Courtesy photos* (below) Dorothy and Don retired and moved to Bloomington 25 years ago. *Photo by Rodney Margison*



"Then he started driving me all the time. We had so much in common. We talked about being on the road, traveling with the bands and everything, and we fell in love."

Though they talked of marriage, Dorothy says she had to wait three years for Don to agree. "He finally got up against the wall and said, 'Okay, I'll marry you.' I was 27 at the time. I was desperate!" Don, 88, adds with a chuckle, "My proposal was, 'Alright already!'"

Needing a steady income for his family, Don used his bachelor's degree in photography from the Illinois Institute of Technology to secure a long career at Allstate Insurance. "You [just] had to have a degree in anything," Don explains. On the side, he kept performing with Norm Ladd. Dorothy, who started singing at 18, continued working as a vocalist while raising their two daughters. She had her last job as a vocalist at 63.

They retired 25 years ago and moved to Bloomington with no prior ties to the city. "The university attracted us with all the music they had to offer," Dorothy says, adding that Don has since played with the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra, Bloomington Community Band, and the Bloomington Brass Band.

"After 63 years, it's like you're one organism, one person. I can't imagine not being together," Don says. "We're happier together than we would be apart."

Dorothy agrees, saying, "We have so much in common, so much to share. ... We still have those same feelings." ✨

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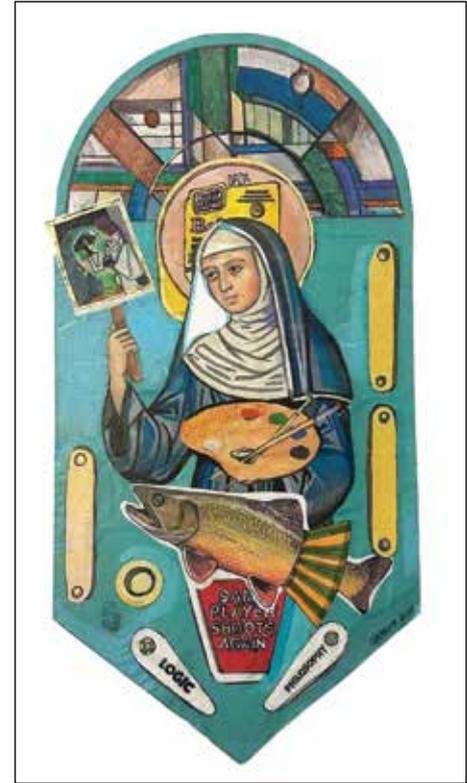
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# Jennifer Herrold Paintings

## Mixing Humor and History



“I’ve always felt humor was very important,” explains artist Jennifer Herrold. “When I do my work, I don’t want it to be so serious, but I still want to be taken seriously.”

The daughter of artists and art professors, Herrold aspired to a creative life. Her late father, David Herrold—a professor of art at DePauw University in Greencastle,

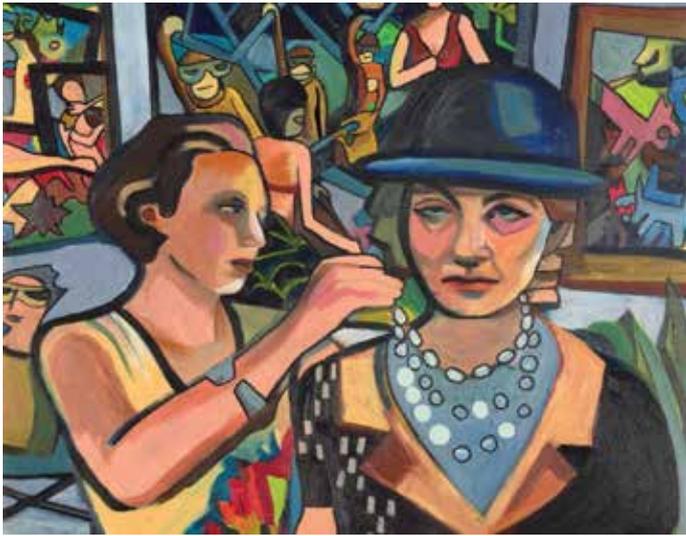
Indiana—served as an early teacher. For her final two years of high school, she attended Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan, where she received the President’s Award in Art and a metalsmithing scholarship.

Herrold first moved to Bloomington to study fine arts as an undergrad at Indiana University. After graduating, she moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, and later New York City, where she exhibited her art and worked as an assistant to a sculptor. She then returned to IU as an M.F.A. candidate in graphic design.

Her earlier work often skewed contemporary life, while her latest series have looked to the past for inspiration. For example, Herrold’s recent Renaissance Pinball series began with a realization that vintage pinball playfields resembled the round-topped niches found in ▶

(this page and opposite page) Examples of artist Jennifer Herrold’s work. *Courtesy images (below) Herrold at home with her beagle-Boston terrier rescue, Ellie. Photo by Rodney Margison*





religious panel paintings. Herrold repeated pinball motifs like flippers and bumpers throughout the series to create icon-like images of various Christian saints, surrounding the figures with playful, contemporary attributes. She describes her subject matter as resting in the satirical tradition of the British comedy troupe Monty Python.

The same irreverence appears in her series 2-D Historical Busts, which memorializes personages from history, religion, politics, and entertainment—Joan of Arc, Groucho Marx, Tammy Faye Bakker, and Donald Trump, among others—as polychrome statues in cluttered still-life paintings. Herrold calls her works “unstable narratives,” reflecting both her busy compositions and her creative process.

Learn more at [jenniferherrold.com](http://jenniferherrold.com). —*Nanette Esseck Brewer*

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# B-town's Karol Lagodzki's First Novel A Finalist for PEN/Hemingway Award

For local author Karol Lagodzki, writing his first published novel *Controlled Conversations* (Sunbury Press, 2024) was as much a personal obligation as a creative pursuit.

A finalist for the 2025 PEN/Hemingway Award for a debut novel, the story draws from Lagodzki's experience growing up in his home country of Poland during the period of martial law and strict government supervision between 1981 and 1983. When telephone switchboard operator Emilia is ordered to monitor the calls she connects, she stumbles upon a coded conversation that leads her to act against the oppression.

Lagodzki, 56, was compelled to write *Controlled Conversations* when recent politics in the United States began to mirror his childhood experiences in Poland.

"It was important to tell a story

about regular people who were facing an impossible situation in that autocratic regime," says Lagodzki. "While we no longer have telephone stations where calls are being connected by hand, when many feel they cannot say what they believe their truth is in public—and online is public—then we live in an autocratic society."

Lagodzki is a "Bloomerang," having first lived in Bloomington between 2001 and 2003 when he attained his M.B.A. at Indiana University. After traveling the country, in 2009 Lagodzki moved back to work for Cook Medical where he is a senior global product manager and writes in his spare time.

"I really enjoy my day job, and when that happens it also helps you to feel good about your creative calling because they are not competing with each other," says Lagodzki.



Karol Lagodzki's novel, *Controlled Conversations*, draws from his experience growing up in Poland during the period of martial law and strict government supervision between 1981 and 1983. Photo by Morgan Kraemer

"At the same time, it is important for me to compartmentalize my life at work versus my life as an artist so I can be fully who I am when I write."

Lagodzki credits his wife, Meg—a local painter and successful artist in her own right—for being a partner in his writing success.

"As a writer I often have imposter syndrome, and while it didn't go away when I got shortlisted for an award, it did feel good," says Lagodzki. "It also meant other people agreed the story needed to be told and that was extremely rewarding."

Lagodzki is currently shopping his latest finished novel that follows two timelines: 1395 Poland and near-future 2030 in a small university town in Indiana that "may or may not be Bloomington." Visit [klagodzki.com](http://klagodzki.com) for updates. —Elizabeth Ellis



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# Hoosier Alley

## A New Indoor Amusement Park



It's all fun and games in the former location of the Lucky's grocery store at 2424 S. Walnut, where Hoosier Alley Entertainment opened its doors in September. In addition to 20 bowling lanes, including a six-lane VIP section, the entertainment center offers axe throwing, dozens of arcade games, bumper cars, laser tag, roller skating, and food and drinks—complete with a bar.

“After many demographic and feasibility studies in various places across Indiana, we found the former Lucky’s location. It was in an area that would boost the south side of Bloomington, and it had the right square footage,” say owners Stacy and William McCrary.

The McCrary family also owns the Rock-N-Bowl in Paoli, Indiana, which they purchased in 2003.

The couple first met as teenagers, working together at a bowling alley in Tennessee. As William’s interest in mechanics grew, he started traveling the country to install bowling equipment, all while gathering ideas from other entertainment centers. Many of these inspirations can be seen throughout Hoosier Alley.

“Our family was deeply involved in nearly every part of construction,” says their daughter, Emma McCrary, who is also the sales director. “The tables at the bowling lanes, the bar counters, the skate counter, and the service desks were all hand-built in-house,” she says. “One of our favorite memories was spending the entire Fourth of July alongside our manager and some of the crew, laying the floor in our bowling and axe throwing area. We even had our first meal from the kitchen that day.”

Hoosier Alley can also host parties and celebrations and corporate and business events. “From team-building outings to company holiday parties, it’s clear there was a need in Bloomington for a place where groups can eat, drink, and have fun together—all under one roof,” says Emma.

Visit [hoosieralley.com](http://hoosieralley.com). —Heather Ray



Hoosier Alley features 20 bowling lanes, axe throwing, arcade games, bumper cars, laser tag, roller skating, and food and drinks—complete with a full bar. *Courtesy photos*

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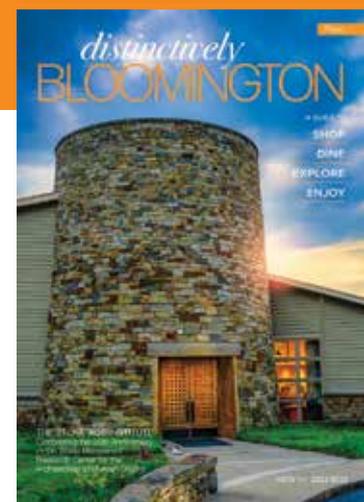
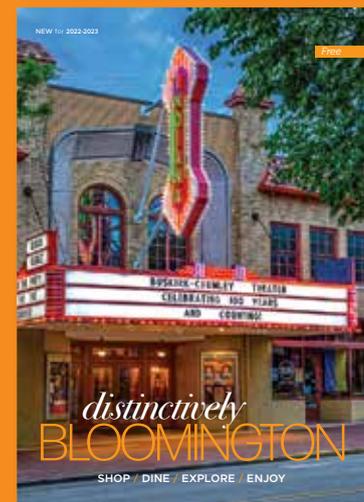
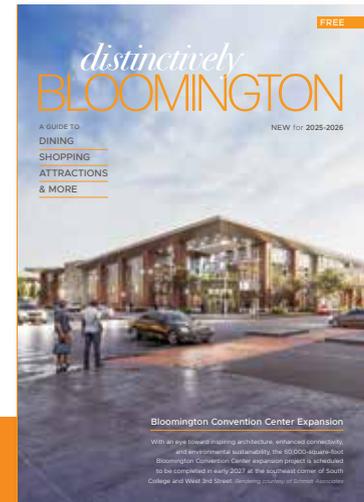
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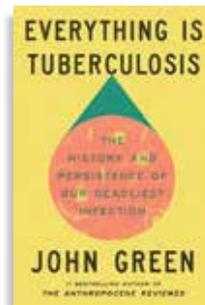
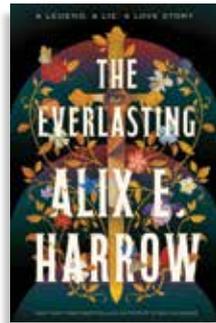
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## Fiction Bestsellers

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2. *Departure 37* by Scott Carson (a.k.a. B-town's Michael Koryta)
3. *The Correspondent* by Virginia Evans
4. *Project Hail Mary* by Andy Weir
5. *The Secret of Secrets* by Dan Brown
6. *Alchemised* by SenLinYu
7. *The Black Wolf* by Louise Penny
8. *The God of the Woods* by Liz Moore
9. *The Widow* by John Grisham
10. *Heart the Lover* by Lily King



## Non-Fiction Bestsellers

1. *Everything Is Tuberculosis: The History and Persistence of Our Deadliest Infection* by John Green
2. *Always Remember* by Charlie Mackesy
3. *The Gales of November* by John U. Bacon
4. *1929* by Andrew Ross Sorkin
5. *A Fever in the Heartland* by Timothy Egan
6. *College Girl, Missing* by Shawn Cohen
7. *On Her Game* by Christine Brennan
8. *The Book of Delights* by Ross Gay (Bloomingtonian)
9. *The Look* by Michelle Obama
10. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer

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# Overtuned Fest

## Fusion of Classical & Rock Music

The inaugural Overtuned Fest will take place February 23–26 at several venues around town. Sponsored in part by WFHB-FM, the festival features contemporary classical music fused with rock.

The festival is the creation of three friends from graduate programs in the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. The trio won a Community Impact Grant from the school’s Office of Entrepreneurship and Career Development last fall to stage a Bloomington festival of contemporary music.

Festival co-artistic directors Alexey Logunov, a doctorate student in composition; Christopher Herz, a doctorate student in violin; and Jee Won Kim, who holds a doctorate in composition, say that the festival’s mission is to “dissolve the barriers between musical worlds [and] exhibit the creative potential that emerges when experimental contemporary classical music intersects with rock.” Kim explains, “Overtuning instruments creates a special sound. Fusing rock and contemporary classical is itself an overtuning.”

An IU-student rock band will perform a prologue concert on February 23 from 7–9 p.m. in the Rose Firebay Theater at the John Waldron Arts Center. Herz will play electric guitar; Logunov, piano and electronics. Herz composed one of the pieces



(l-r) Overtuned Fest co-artistic directors Christopher Herz, Jee Won Kim, and Alexey Logunov. Courtesy photo

and other IU students composed the rest.

Other performances include:

- February 24, 7–8 p.m., IU Whittenberger Auditorium: “Reimagining Schubert’s *Winterreise*”—several pieces by composition students reinterpret the poetry-based song cycle through baritone voice, piano, electric guitar, violin, double bass, and electric bass.

- February 25, 6–7:30 p.m., Pillar Arts Performance Space (at College Mall): Featuring festival artist Jiji Kim, a composer and IU professor of guitar who has performed at Carnegie Hall and the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, who will play both classical and electric guitars. According to her Jacobs School profile, *The Washington Post* named Kim “one of the 21 composers/performers who sound like tomorrow.”

- February 26, 7–8:30 p.m., Switchyard Park Pavilion: For the festival’s finale, an electric guitarist, bass guitarist, and drummer join a chamber orchestra to perform *Rock Sinfonia*, songs written by Jacobs School students. Herz will play violin while visual artists project videos inspired by the music and conversations with the composers.

The festival also includes workshops at area high schools. For more information, visit [overtunedfest.com](http://overtunedfest.com). —Paul Bickley

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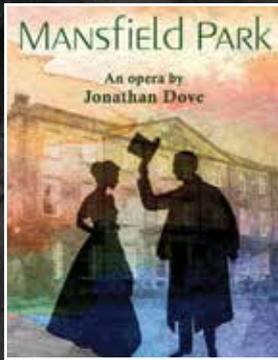
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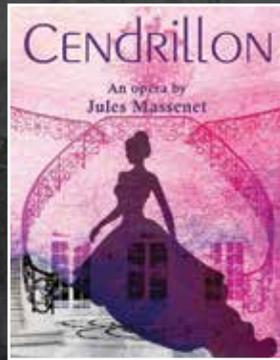


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*Jonathan Dove*

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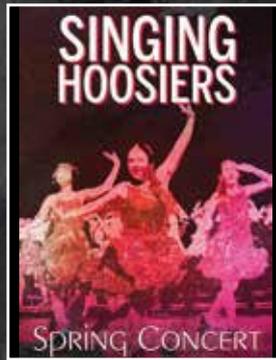
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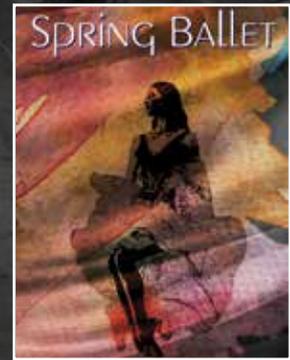
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# The Musicmakers

## “No fun without music and no music without fun.”



(above) The Musicmakers perform all types of music, including patriotic, musicals, madrigals, jazz, and pop; (right) Director Katrina Ladwig believes the group's statewide MMIA festival each July features the largest statewide women's choral group in the country. *Photos by James Kellar*

While participation in women's clubs has steadily declined since the 1960s, The Musicmakers, the Monroe County Extension Chorus, continues to be active after more than 40 years.

Founded in 1981, the group is part of the Purdue Extension Homemaker Clubs. The Homemakers' original mission was to provide home economics education and social opportunities for farmers' wives. In 1934, they formed a statewide choral group called Melody Makers of Indiana Association (MMIA), of which there are currently 19 member choruses from counties across the state.



At its peak, MMIA had more than 3,000 singers; today there are 289. Katrina Ladwig, director of Monroe County's chorus, believes that MMIA's goal remains relevant: "To enrich our communities and create a bond with other people throughout the state of Indiana, while providing the opportunity to foster healthy relationships through the medium of music."

The local Musicmakers has 22 women—including the director and accompanist—who range in age from early 40s to 80s. Ladwig notes that singers of any ability are welcome to join, although some prior group singing experience is a plus.

The Musicmakers perform all types of music, including patriotic, musicals, madrigals, jazz, and pop. While they take their music seriously, the group's motto is "No fun without music and no music without fun."

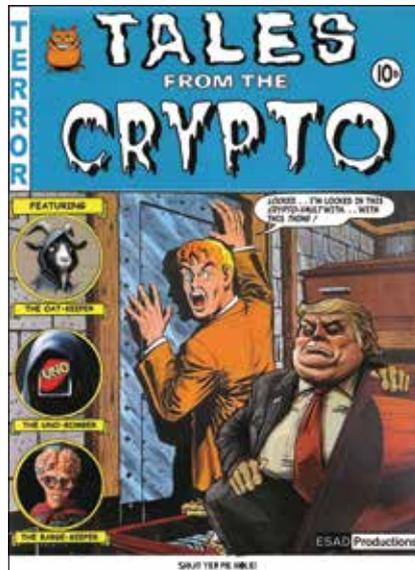
The Musicmakers meet Monday nights at the Bloomington Free Methodist Church, 1121 S. Lincoln St., and present several free public performances each year, including a spring concert in April, a Veterans Day celebration, at the Monroe County Extension Homemakers Achievement Banquet, at the Indiana State Fair, and for local senior living communities. They are also available to sing at other community events and festivals.

Each year, they learn 12 new songs that have been selected by the MMIA director, and usually perform at a festival each July as a combined chorus featuring singers from all the state's county groups. Ladwig believes it is the largest statewide women's choral group in the country, producing an "amazing, incredible sound."

This year's festival, held in association with the annual Indiana Extension Homemakers Association Home & Family Conference, will be July 15–17 in Nashville, Indiana. —*Nanette Esseck Brewer*

A man with short grey hair is sitting in a bookstore, looking directly at the camera. Behind him are shelves filled with books. The text "DALE STEFFEY BOOKS" is overlaid at the top in a large, white, serif font. Below it, in smaller white text, are the affiliations: "Member: Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America" and "International League of Antiquarian Booksellers". A list of book genres is displayed in a typewriter-style font: "Academic &amp; Scholarly", "Rare &amp; Collectible", "Literature", "Mystery", "Fine Bindings", and "Ephemera". At the bottom, contact information is provided: "Purchasing single items to collections", "steffeyadams@yahoo.com", and phone numbers "812-333-2903h, 812-345-1768c".

# Exclusive Interview with Creator of “Shut Yer Pie Hole!”



Bloomington's very own zine, *Shut Yer Pie Hole!* Courtesy images

*Bloom* contributor Lee Ann Sandweiss chased down the anonymous creator of *Shut Yer Pie Hole!* (*SYPH*), “an independent periodical that satirizes local, state, and national issues and figures.” The following are excerpts from her exclusive interview.

**BLOOM:** *SYPH* calls itself a “zine.” How is that different from a magazine?

**SYPH:** We leave the “MAGA” out because we haven’t yet been cleared for use of the word MAGA.

**BLOOM:** When did *SYPH*'s first issue appear? How frequently is it published?

**SYPH:** A new issue appears about once a month, depending on our coffee consumption. They have become available to the public since the pro-Palestinian encampment at Indiana University, when we printed them on coasters for protesters to protect Dunn Meadow from coffee stains.

**BLOOM:** *SYPH* is self-supporting and free. Do contributions, grants, or advertisers offset the costs?

**SYPH:** We haven’t applied for grants or sought advertising. We do accept contributions, and we’ll continue to print as long as my mother’s bank account holds out.

**BLOOM:** What is your editorial mission statement?

**SYPH:** Our main goal is to get IU President Pamela Whitten to notice us. Until then, we will continue to pretend to be leftists masquerading as right-wingers poking fun at right-wingers masquerading as leftists.

**BLOOM:** You grew up in Bloomington and you’ve told us you’re proud that people gravitated to this community to participate in the cultural scene. But given some recent events, you’ve said that

Bloomington may no longer be viewed as a welcoming place for creative spirits.

**SYPH:** IU has been the core of Bloomington arts and culture. It drew young artists and thinkers, fostering generations of community creativity. From Hoagy Carmichael to Jim Jones, many came as students; some stayed to do amazing things—things that made Bloomington unique in Indiana. With [recent restrictions on free speech] at IU, we expect this to dissipate over time, leaving an empty husk of a nondescript midwestern town.

**BLOOM:** Any last words to share with our readers?

**SYPH:** The joke is that there is no joke.

Limited copies of *SYPH* are available at Cup & Kettle Tea Co., Soma Coffeehouse & Juice Bar, Redbud Books, White Rabbit Print & Design, and Juniper Art Gallery. For inquiries and donations, contact *Shut Yer Pie Hole!* P.O. Box 2494, Bloomington, IN 47403, or [shutyerpiehole.org](http://shutyerpiehole.org). ✨

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# 'The Best of The Best: Jazz from Detroit' Documentary Made by Former B-towner

by David Brent Johnson

Detroit may be best known for its cars and its hit Motown records, but a Bloomington-born writer is returning to his hometown to make a cinematic case for another important contribution—jazz.

"The history of jazz cannot be told without telling the history of jazz from Detroit," says Mark Stryker, whose 2019 book *Jazz from Detroit* serves as the basis for a new documentary film about the city's rich past and present-day jazz scene.

The film, *The Best of the Best: Jazz from Detroit*, makes its Bloomington debut on February 21 at Indiana University Cinema. Following the screening, IU jazz professor Natalie Boeyink will moderate a discussion with Stryker, the film's writer and producer, and his two New York-based creative partners: director, editor, and producer Daniel Loewenthal and producer Roberta Friedman.

The film embeds the story of Detroit's influential jazz legacy within the history of the city and its resilient Black community. Among the musicians featured are legends like Elvin Jones, Barry Harris, Yusef Lateef, Ron Carter, and Kenny Burrell, as well as contemporary stars like bassist Robert Hurst, an IU



Bloomington native Mark Stryker's book, *Jazz from Detroit*, serves as the basis for a new documentary film, *The Best of the Best: Jazz from Detroit*. Photo by Donald Dietz

An illustration of the Morgenstern BOOKS storefront at night. The sign above the entrance reads "Morgenstern BOOKS" in a stylized font. The entrance has double glass doors and large windows on either side, all of which are brightly lit from within, showing bookshelves and various items. Two potted plants are placed on the sidewalk in front of the entrance.

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Jacobs School of Music alum.

Now streaming on Amazon Prime Video, the documentary was previously seen at nine film festivals across North America and Europe. Future screenings are scheduled at universities, performing arts centers, and jazz clubs.

Stryker grew up in the 1970s listening to WFIU-FM jazz host Michael Bourne's afternoon program, *There*, and eventually seeking out the legendary DJ—who also wrote for *Downbeat* and other publications—to be his mentor for a high school English class project. "Michael was a foundational figure for me," says Stryker. "I saw up close what a life surrounded by music could look like if you were not a musician."

Stryker says it is "extraordinarily meaningful" to be showing *Best of the Best: Jazz from Detroit* in his hometown. "Everything that I've done in my career, you can trace back to my learning music in Bloomington, becoming enamored with jazz in Bloomington, first encountering so many of the Detroit musicians that are in my film in Bloomington," he says. "My only regret is that neither of my parents are around to see this, because they would have been very proud." ✨

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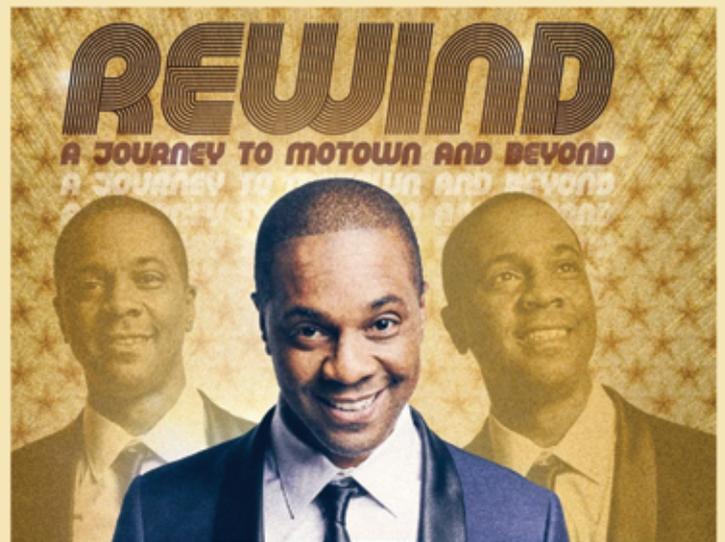
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Jerome takes the audience through electrifying renditions of timeless hits from some of the world's most iconic musicians and renowned artists. With a set list that includes songs from legends like Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin, Sam Cooke, and Stevie Wonder, Jerome's soulful delivery ensures an unforgettable experience.

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# Bridges MAYO Nurturing Young Musicians for 25 Years



(l-r) Rosie Aparicio Osorio on violin, Aralyn Olivo on viola, Francesca Samarotto playing cello, and Chamber Music Match Up Director Adrea Kleesattel at a recent Bridges MAYO rehearsal. Photo by Rodney Margison

a group of youth musicians in a series of tangos created by local composer Aaron Travers.

“Just five minutes with Winnie, and you’ll be in love with tango,” says Olivo. “She’s bringing her tango dancing friends, so it will be really interactive.”

For the second special performance on April 21, both Bridges MAYO orchestras will team up with youth thespians from Reimagining Opera for Kids and Stages Bloomington to perform *Mooch the Magnificent*, an opera written for young performers by local composer Lauren Bernofsky. The performance will be held at Fairview Elementary and co-conducted by Bernofsky and Chen.

“We have a lot of creativity in our community,” says Olivo. “Looking at all these bridges and these connections, it feels very affirming.”

Visit [magbloom.com/mayomusic](http://magbloom.com/mayomusic). ✨

by Sophie Bird Murphy

For 25 years, Bridges Musical Arts Youth Organization (MAYO) has provided students ages 8 to 18 with unique opportunities to nurture their love of music. Through youth orchestras, summer camps, special workshops, and performances with local musicians, Bridges MAYO opens doors for these students to develop their skills, build relationships with musical mentors, and make likeminded friends, says Director Maggie Olivo.

“We don’t have any youth orchestras [in town] except for Bridges MAYO that are robust, full symphony orchestras,” she says. “It’s really beautiful when you have kids who love making music, and they get to meet others they wouldn’t normally interact with and play together in an ensemble.”

Via two youth orchestras—a non-audition orchestra and an advanced audition orchestra—Bridges MAYO brings together string, woodwind, brass, and percussion players from over 14 schools, as well as homeschooled students. The orchestras are conducted by Indiana University Jacobs School of Music doctoral students Chase Remsburg and Wei-Chung Chen, who Olivo refers to as a “power team.”

“We wanted something that was accessible whether you only did school music and never had private lessons, or if you were homeschooled and only knew private instruction,” says Olivo. “We love to brag about how diverse our musicians are.”

In celebration of its 25th anniversary, Bridges MAYO has prepared two special performances for its spring semester. The first, known as *Tango with Winnie*, will take place on March 10 at Bell Trace Senior Living Community under the direction of Bridges MAYO artist-in-residence Winnie Cheung. Cheung will conduct

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# The Pottery House Studio

## A Community Creative Space



The Pottery House Studio offers walk-in pottery painting, adult clay classes, teen and youth instruction, and 24-hour open studio access for enrolled students. Photos by Rodney Margison

by Brittany Marshall

“Clay is an amazing material—earth, water, and fire,” says Susan Snyder. “It must be shaped, dried, and baked. There’s an element of surprise in how it turns out, sometimes it’s even better than you imagined.”

That sense of discovery defines The Pottery House Studio, a community-centered paint and clay studio that Snyder founded in 2016. Designed as a welcoming space for all experience levels, the studio invites artists, families, students, and first-time makers to explore creativity together in a relaxed, social environment.



Susan Snyder founded the studio in 2016 to create a welcoming space for all experience levels.

Snyder, 56, says her lifelong connection to ceramics and to the Bloomington community shaped its mission. She earned her B.F.A. from Indiana University with a minor in ceramics and completed more than 1,100 hours of intensive ceramic training in Italy. She has taught at the John Waldron Arts Center and created installations displayed at Fairview and University elementary schools.

“This time was instrumental in taking me in the direction to becoming a potter, says Snyder. “It’s expensive and a bit messy to make a home studio. I wanted to offer something to the community that could bring people together and give them an outlet to create.”

Snyder began the studio in her 1 1/2-car garage and has since grown it into a four-suite space in Williamsburg Center, 223 S. Pete Ellis Drive.

Pottery House Studio offers walk-in pottery painting, adult clay classes, teen and youth instruction, and 24-hour open studio access for enrolled students. The paint studio features hundreds of ceramic pieces, from dinnerware and vases to figurines and seasonal décor, with three glaze finishes available in a wide range of colors.

The clay studio is fully equipped with pottery wheels, a slab roller, extruder, kiln, clay recycling room, and dedicated storage for students’ work. Bisque and glaze firings are available, and custom templates can be created for special events.

Beyond classes, the studio hosts milestone celebrations and offers a mobile pottery studio that brings painting parties on-site.

“It’s so important to focus on the process of making something, even if the final product isn’t a masterpiece. So much of the value is the experience and the connections people make.”

Visit [potteryhousestudio.com](http://potteryhousestudio.com). ✨



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# B-town Farm Stop Collective Year-Round Indoor Farmers' Market

Bloomington Farm Stop Collective is a daily option for shoppers wanting to buy locally sourced, farm-fresh products. Located at 902 W. Kirkwood, Farm Stop offers a selection of veggies, fruits, meats, eggs, dairy, soaps, honeys, syrups, jams, plant starts, and more, plus a café serving teas, coffees, and baked goods. It's a year-round agricultural cooperative, entirely owned by the farmers and producers who sell items there.

The Farm Stop, which opened in 2021 as Rose Hill Farm Stop, rebranded in 2023 to better reflect its values, mission, and dedication to the community. "Our goal is to support as much local production as possible," says Bobbi Boos, manager and one of the Farm Stop farmers. "All of our vendors sell on consignment, so they actually own their product. They set their own prices, and they know they're going to make 70% of the sale," she says.

Being part of an agricultural co-op can be a great advantage for novice producers. "We can help merchandise products from new farmers for our consumers," says Boos. Another advantage



(above) The Farm Stop is a year-round agricultural cooperative, entirely owned by the farmers and producers who sell items there; (below) Bobby Boos, manager and one of the Farm Stop farmers. Photos by Rodney Margison



is for vendors like Piccoli Dolci, a local maker of Italian goods, as they can communicate with farmers to source ingredients.

Boos explains that by being a stable site for farmers to sell, they're more willing to try new things. "Our farmers have a chance to be more creative and more experimental by making things like hot sauce and kimchi," she says.

"The café is also a really awesome part of our model," Boos adds. It features a seasonal menu of housemade items like soups and baked goods, using local ingredients from their owners. They also recently hired a kitchen manager to oversee sustainability efforts. "We've been trying to preserve as much as possible," says Boos. "We freeze or dry ingredients so we can make soups and spreads all winter."

The café recently secured a permit to sell beer and started Late Night Wednesdays between 7 and 9 p.m. featuring live music.

For more information, visit [bloomingtonfarmstop.coop](http://bloomingtonfarmstop.coop). —Heather Ray




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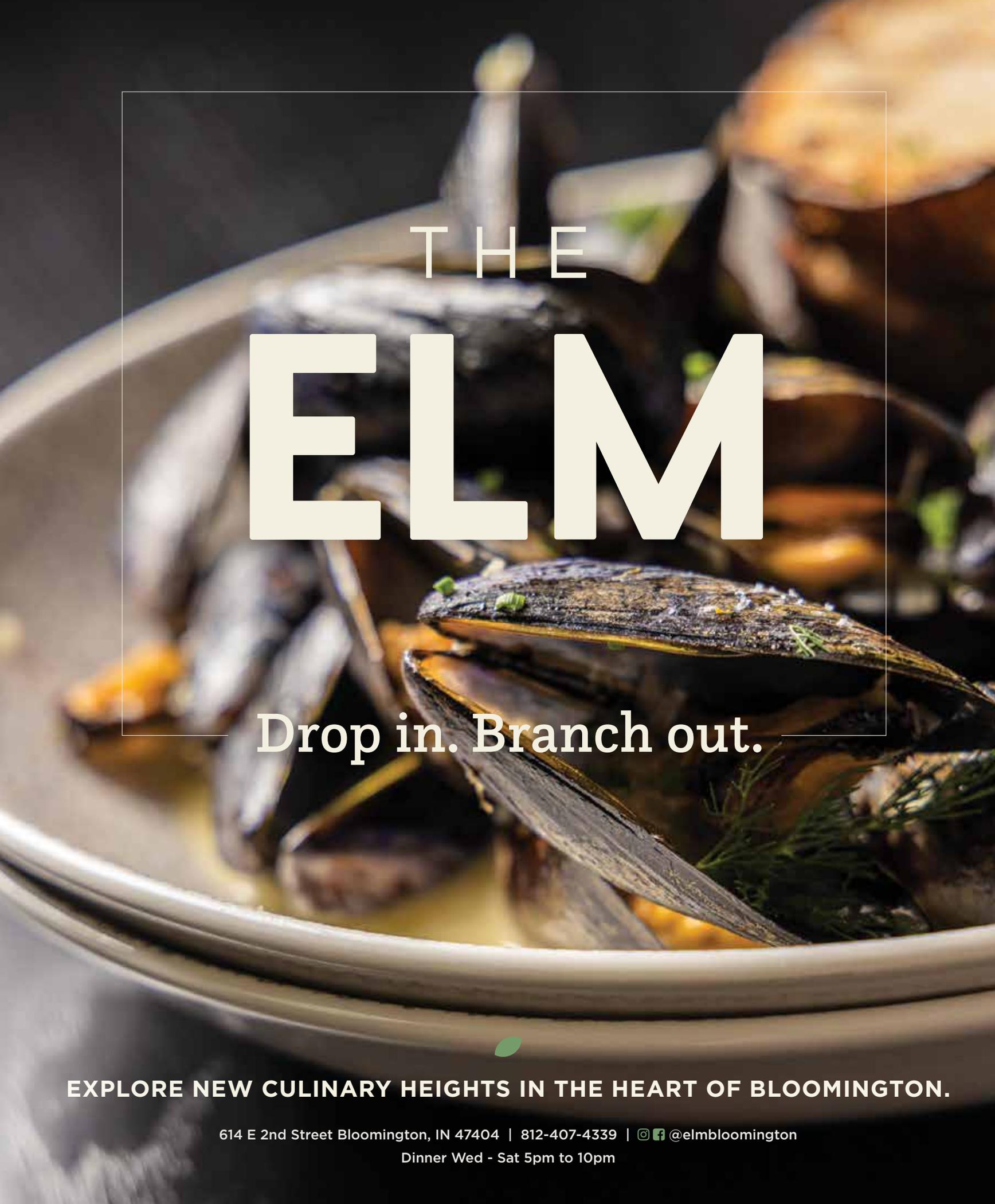
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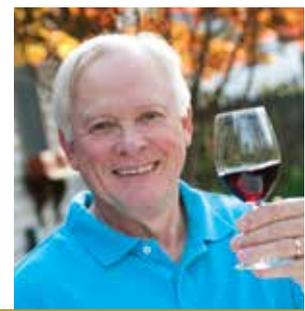
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## Wine in the Movies

It's Halloween and Mortimer Brewster (Cary Grant) stops at his aunts' home in the Bronx to say goodbye before setting out on his honeymoon with his bride, Elaine Harper (Priscilla Lane). Problems begin when he finds a body in the window seat—his sweet aunts are helping lonely old gentlemen out of their misery with specially blended elderberry wine. Chaos reigns when his murderous brother (Raymond Massey) and alcoholic plastic surgeon, Dr. Einstein (Peter Lorre), arrive with their own body in tow. The movie is *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944), a dark screwball comedy with the flavor of elderberry and hints of arsenic, strychnine, and cyanide.

Here are two more where wine influences the story.

Loretta Castorini (Cher) is a widow. She didn't follow tradition when she married and bad luck followed when her husband was run over by a bus. Now engaged to Johnny Cammareri, she'll avoid trouble by doing things traditionally. Loretta and her father, Cosmo, celebrate with a glass of sparkling wine, adding a sugar cube to ward off any more bad luck. Unfortunately, she falls for Johnny's brother, Ronny (Nicolas Cage), who, through his own bad luck, lost a hand in a bread slicer. Johnny returns from Italy and, superstitiously thinking their wedding will cause his mother's death, breaks off the



In *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944), the elderberry wine is specially blended with more than just grapes. Courtesy photo

engagement. Ronny takes the ring and asks Loretta to marry him. The family toasts with Mumm Cordon Rouge Champagne and sugar cubes. In *Moonstruck* (1987), wine, with a little sweetener, has the power to ward off superstition and bad luck.

In the late 19th century, Babette (Stéphane Audran), a refugee from the French civil war, is a cook for two spinster sisters in a remote Danish village. She is a mysterious addition to the occupants of this starkly pious village with its strict religion and austere tastes. Babette's only link to her previous life is a lottery ticket—she receives word she has won a large prize.

The townspeople are surprised when she opts to stay in the village and prepare an exotic and sumptuous feast, fit for the finest French restaurant. Each course is accompanied by a fine French wine: a Veuve Clicquot 1860 Champagne, a Clos de Vougeot 1845 Pinot Noir, a Sauternes, and Vieux Marc de Grande Champagne cognac. It is a revolution of sensual pleasure and breaks down the villagers' mistrust and superstition. *Babette's Feast* (1987), is based upon a story by Karen Blixen, using her pen name, Isak Dinesen. It is a movie using gastronomy and fine wine to show appreciation, self-sacrifice, and community.

Wine brings people together in many movies. I'm sure that each of you have a favorite where wine influences the plot. And I will drink to that. ✨

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# DISHES of the WORLD

BY KATHY SCHICK & NICK TOTH

Archaeologists and Co-Directors of The Stone Age Institute



Photo by Rodney Margison

Flag and globe from Vecteezy.com

Passionate chefs, husband and wife Nick and Kathy have traveled the world, experiencing many rich cultures and cuisines. Recently, they embarked on a four-year culinary odyssey: Every weekend, they are cooking the national dish of one of the world's 193 countries.

For this sixth installment in Bloom, Nick and Kathy prepared pho (pronounced "fuh"), a Vietnamese noodle soup with beef, pork, and a variety of vegetables and spices.

Vietnam is located in southeast Asia and is the world's 15th-most-populous country with 101 million people.

## PHO: VIETNAMESE NOODLE SOUP

### Ingredients

8 oz. pho rice noodles (widely available at local Asian stores)

#### For the soup:

1/2 pound of beef filet (cheaper cuts will be tough), salted and peppered, and sliced very thinly across grain

1/2 pound of pork tenderloin, salted and peppered, browned in a skillet (with a little oil) on all sides, then sliced very thinly across grain

1 large yellow onion, quartered

3-inch piece of ginger, peeled and cut in half lengthwise

5 star anise

2 cardamom pods

4 cloves

2 teaspoons fennel seeds

2 teaspoons coriander seeds

Optional: 8 Chinese black (shitake) mushrooms, soaked in hot water, and tough stems removed (a few whole ones can be used for optics)

6 cups rich beef broth (we used beef bone broth)

2 cups water

1 tablespoon fish sauce

1/4 teaspoon hoisin sauce

1/4 teaspoon soy sauce

1/4 teaspoon red chili paste (sambal oelek)

1 tablespoon brown sugar

### Garnishes:

4 scallions, chopped

2 jalapeño peppers or hot red peppers, seeded and chopped (a few whole red peppers can also be added to garnish for optics when serving)

1 large handful fresh cilantro, chopped

1 large handful Thai basil\*, chopped

1 cup fresh mung bean sprouts

2 limes cut in wedges

### Dips (optional):

Hoisin sauce

Sriracha sauce

### Directions

1. Cook rice noodles as directed, drain and set aside.
2. Put onion quarters and ginger in a dry skillet and sear over medium heat until lightly browned (about 4 minutes).
3. Put cloves, star anise, cinnamon, fennel seeds, and coriander seeds in a dry skillet and toast a few minutes, until fragrant. Wrap toasted spices in cheesecloth and tie with a string.
4. In a large pot, add broth, water, the seared onions and ginger, the toasted spices (in cheesecloth), fish sauce, hoisin sauce, soy sauce, chili garlic paste, brown sugar, and soaked mushrooms, bring to a boil, then simmer for 30 minutes. Salt and pepper to taste.
5. Prepare garnishes (scallions, hot peppers, cilantro, Thai basil, mung bean sprouts, lime wedges) while soup is cooking.
6. After simmering for 30 minutes, add sliced beef and pork to the simmering broth for about three minutes, then remove from heat.
7. Put cooked noodles in the bottom of serving bowls, add soup and desired garnishes. You can dip the meat in the hoisin and/or sriracha sauces, if you wish.
8. This dish is well-paired with a rice wine (like sake) and traditional Vietnamese music (search on YouTube for "Vietnamese dan bau," a one-string zither). ✨



Pho is a Vietnamese noodle soup containing beef, pork, and a variety of vegetables and spices. Courtesy photo

**\*Note:** Asian ingredients (e.g. rice noodles, hoisin sauce, thai basil, fish sauce, chili garlic paste, shitake mushrooms, etc.) are readily available at Asian and international food stores, and many can also be found at the supermarket.

fashion/shopping

# Simply Primitive Home Goods French Country Cottage & More



by Barb Berggoetz

Susan Starnes-Liford's home goods shop, Simply Primitive, bursts with a plethora of candle scents, a multitude of hand soaps, creams, and jewelry,

and an eclectic mix of kitchenware, olive oils, lamps, paintings, and handmade furniture.

"I'm really proud of what I've done," says Starnes-Liford. She describes the store's items as French country cottage, primitive, and industrial, and many are from area artisans and businesses. The shop, located at 4445 W. Ind. 45, also carries more than 200 scents of candles from her Hilltop Candles business.

"I've always enjoyed burning candles and lighting them at meals," explains Starnes-Liford, who worked 30 years as a nurse at the former Bloomington Hospital, primarily in labor and delivery. She started candlemaking by purchasing a commercial kit and teaching the craft to herself.

Starnes-Liford first sold candles from her west-side Monroe County home starting in 2011 and then bought the rights to some fragrances created by a Kentucky candle company that closed.

She makes all her own candles ranging from 16 ounces to two gallons. The scents are numerous—sugared spruce, peppermint, juniper Jack Frost, vanilla bean, pumpkin pecan waffle, and more.

Over the years, Starnes-Liford developed friendships and business relationships with other artisans from whom she buys products to sell. Among several builders whose work she carries is Steve Benjamin, who ▶



(this page and opposite page) Simply Primitive, a home goods shop featuring French country cottage, primitive, and industrial items. Photos by Sarah Slover



Owner Susan Starnes-Liford sells candles from her Hilltop Candles business, as well as items from other local artisans.



refurbishes lumber from old homes and builds hutches, buffets, and other furniture.

“The wood is all from Bloomington from the 1860s to 1890s,” she says, adding the furniture is “just special and very well made.”

Simply Primitive sells goat milk and cancer-care soaps and hydrating creams from Bass Farms in Shelbyville, Indiana; handcrafted wire jewelry from Aura art

wear in Bloomington; fruit butters, jams, and jellies from Dillman Farm in Bloomington; Amish baked goods from Homestead Restaurant in Odon, Indiana; and many other products that are frequently changed with the seasons and holidays.

For more information, visit facebook.com/simprim or call 812-825-9660. ✨

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# Bird-Dog Vintage & Vinyl Located in Bloomington Antique Mall

Bird-Dog Vintage & Vinyl began in 2000, a passion that co-owners Jeff Shew and Tiffany Owczarski-Shew can trace back to high school.

“That is how we got the bug,” says Tiffany, referring to the antique store where they both worked in Michigan City. “What we love is the history and the repurposing rather than filling a landfill.”

Jeff learned a lot about the antique business from his grandfather, whose antique experience and advice helped Jeff begin his business while a student at Indiana University. Bird-Dog, named after a family pet, began with a focus on vinyl records, but has grown to include magazines, signs, paintings, maps, frames, clothing, architectural pieces, and light fixtures.

Tiffany began helping full time 10 years ago after leaving her job at Chase Bank. Their 17-year-old son, Walter, who Tiffany refers to her as her “right-hand man,” has also taken an active role.

“It’s always great to hear from customers who are grateful for an item that reminds them of their parents or grandparents,” she says.



(l-r) Walter Shew and Tiffany Owczarski-Shew. Tiffany says Walter, her 17-year-old son, is her “right hand man,” at Bird-Dog. Photo by Rodney Margison

For the past 15 years, they’ve occupied three booth spaces in the Bloomington Antique Mall, 311 W. 7th St. They also had space at Westbury Antique Market before it closed.

Online sales have also helped sustain the business. “When eBay first started, people didn’t feel secure about purchasing items,” Tiffany says. “Technology has evolved, and now people are more comfortable with spending their money online. The things you’d think wouldn’t sell well online and would be better on display now sell better online.”

One of their most notable items was a Salvador Dali sculpture that sold for \$10,000. Tiffany also mentioned acquiring a bench with a Ronald McDonald figurine seated on it from the owner of a McDonald’s restaurant.

In the past couple of years, Tiffany says they’ve been helping people downsize, and if they find out that something was worth more than what they initially thought, they will give the money back to the owner. She says, “It’s important to us that it’s a family business and to be involved in the community and to help people preserve history.”

Visit [ebay.com/str/birddogvintageandvinyl](http://ebay.com/str/birddogvintageandvinyl). —Rosie Piga Pizzo

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health/fitness

# YMCA Celebrates 45th Anniversary With New Programs & Facilities

A new strength-training class for women age 40 and over, a tactical boot camp, renovated locker rooms, more members' scholarships, and a new playground are among enhancements this year at the Monroe County YMCA.

"We are so blessed to serve this community for now over 45 years," says Jason Winkle, CEO. "As this community's needs shift over time, we are excited to continually grow with Monroe County and provide a safe place for families and individuals to learn, grow, and thrive."

The Y's membership has increased to about 14,000 as its facilities have grown. The Southeast Y opened in 1981 and expanded several times; the Northwest Y opened in 2013.

The 2026 goals and new programs follow the Y's celebration of its 45th anniversary and achievements in 2025, says Sarah Dai, director of marketing and communication. The Y thanked its members and donors and welcomed the community at an anniversary party in November at the Southeast Y. More than 850 people attended.

This year, Empower, the strength-training Group Ex class, is



The Monroe County YMCA is a place for individuals and families, such as the Wheeler's, to learn, grow, and thrive. (l-r) Ryan holding baby Lucy, Griffin, Bennett, Cal, Mack, and Kira Wheeler. Photo by Martin Boling

being offered at the Southeast Y to address osteoporosis and help women remain functional while aging, Dai explains. In addition, a prenatal yoga class is offered again. Y aquatics director Mike Pedroni, a veteran, is teaching Tactical Boot Camp, which focuses on military-inspired training, at the Northwest Y.

In January, the Y awarded free and reduced membership scholarships to 411 households, from donations to the Y for All Scholarship Fund, says Dai, up from 382 in 2025. "We are definitely seeing an increase in donations from the community, and we are ramping up ways to keep our programs accessible to everyone," she stresses.

The Southeast Y's renovated locker room was finished in January and financed with YMCA endowment funds.

The Y met its \$45,000 goal to fund the new Southeast Y playground with help from a matching grant from the Indiana Housing and Community Authority's CreatING Places program, Dai says. The playground, constructed last fall, is for Y members, summer camp attendees, and the community. It will be officially unveiled in March.

"We leaned on our donors and members to make this dream come true," says Dai. "This is an exciting new playground designed for children from 2 to 12 years old." —Barb Berggoetz

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# The DOCTOR Is In

BY DR. ROB STONE

## About Dying

She looked up at me with her soft eyes and whispered, “I know this cancer is going to kill me. I’m not afraid of dying. But what am I going to feel like? How does it happen when you die? You’ve cared for so many dying people. Explain it to me, please.”

I replied, “I can tell you from my experience how things generally go, but please stop me if it gets too graphic or too uncomfortable.”

“Go ahead. I’m ready.”

I explained that there are generally three pathways leading to death for most people no matter whether their diagnosis is cancer or heart failure or dementia. To start with,

you could die suddenly. Heart attack, stroke, accident. Any of us could die suddenly tonight, or even in the next few seconds. We all hang by a thread thinner than we want to think. Sudden death is around, but it remains the rarest of the three paths to death.

The most common way people go is gradual decline. Getting weaker, losing your appetite, eating and drinking less. Fading away. Your world shrinks. There are ups and downs, but the trend is relentlessly downward, and in the end you slip into sleep and then coma. That is the most common path that ends in death.

Then there is the third path. This is the

one that is scary. What if it hurts? If it gets really uncomfortable from pain or shortness of breath or nausea? The only good thing about those sorts of suffering is that we have good medicine for them. That’s where hospice comes in. Hospice will take care of you in your home, at a nursing home, or sometimes in an inpatient facility like Bloomington’s Hospice House. The hospice nurses are so good at keeping patients comfortable. There’s morphine for pain or shortness of breath, drugs for nausea or anxiety. Pain is what we fear most. We have excellent drugs for pain, even if you can’t swallow. I want you to know, we can keep you comfortable at the end.

“Does that help you? Tell me what you are thinking.”

“It helps. That’s somehow a little more manageable, a little easier for me to wrap my head around.”

Reading this, I hope I haven’t said too much for some readers. Death is hard to talk about, to think about. In the book *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Crown, 2002), Morrie Schwartz says, “We all know we are going to die, but we don’t believe it.” It can take something like a cancer diagnosis to trigger the courage to look death in the face. I believe it’s worth looking inside ourselves to see if we can spend some time thinking about death before we have a terminal diagnosis. Talking about death can take away some of its power.

Once that door starts to open, all sorts of other possibilities arise. Consider this quote from Stephen Levine, author of the book *Who Dies?* (Anchor, 1989): “If you were going to die soon and had only one phone call you could make, who would you call, and what would you say? And why are you waiting?” I remember the first time I read that passage, I felt a tug in my gut. What was I waiting for?

In coming issues of *Bloom*, “The Doctor Is In” will explore more ideas about death and life and courage and hope and science and philosophy.

Until we meet again, take good care of yourselves. ✨

## For all of life's "What ifs"



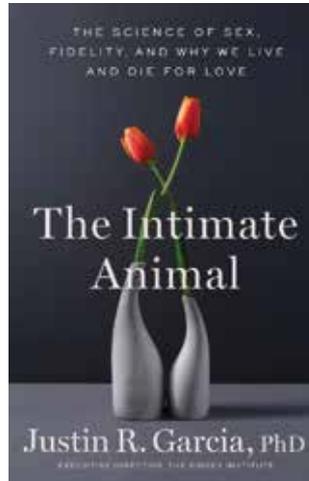
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# Kinsey Author's New Book Explores The Science of Love, Sex & Fidelity



(left) Justin Garcia, executive director of IU's Kinsey Institute, says his new release is "a big-idea science book" intended for a general audience. Photo by Anna Powell Denton

"they're associated with some of the most satisfying experiences people have in their relationships and in their lives. And, when they're out of sync, they're associated with some of the most challenging and difficult experiences people have."

To write *The Intimate Animal*, Garcia drew upon hundreds of his own and others' academic studies in the fields of sex research and relationship science. "I take an arc of a relationship cycle for each chapter," he says. "I start with singlehood and then ... searching for a partner, finding a partner, maintaining a relationship, building a nest or a family together, separating from a relationship, and finding love again—often later in life."

"By understanding the science, we can enjoy our relationships more and be more satisfied when it comes to our pursuit and maintenance of intimacy," Garcia concludes. ✨

by Susan M. Brackney

It's nothing for strangers on planes to ask Justin Garcia for marriage advice. Likewise, folks in coffee shops have been known to whip out their phones to show him their dating apps. "When people find out I'm the executive director of [Indiana University's] Kinsey Institute and that I'm the chief scientific advisor to Match.com, they ask me things—and they'll tell me things," Garcia says.

Conversation topics typically range from dating and marriage to sexual frequency, novelty, and infidelity. All make an appearance in Garcia's new book, *The Intimate Animal: The Science of Sex, Fidelity, and Why We Live and Die for Love* (Little, Brown Spark, 2026). While the evolutionary biologist and anthropologist has published extensively in academic journals and has co-authored scientific tomes, he wanted to break new ground with *The Intimate Animal*. Garcia characterizes the new release as "a big-idea science book" intended for a general audience.

Among those big ideas? "Popularly, when we talk about monogamy, we often confuse two components—social monogamy and sexual monogamy," Garcia says. (While social monogamy refers to the structure of our romantic, pair-bonded relationships, sexual monogamy is a matter of fidelity to one's partner.)

"They're really two different levers in our evolutionary biology and in our brains," he continues. "The tension and the push and pull between social and sexual monogamy explains so many of the highs and lows in our relationships."

When social and sexual monogamy are aligned, Garcia notes,



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# Plants, Décor, and \$3 Homemade Pie At the 2026 Garden Fair



(l-r) MCMGA member Ed Kitchen and president Pam Roberts.  
Photo by Martin Boling

by *Sophie Bird Murphy*

On April 11 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., the Monroe County Master Gardeners Association (MCMGA) will host its annual Garden Fair at the Switchyard Park Pavilion. Now in its 16th year, the event is expected to draw more than 2,000 visitors to browse wares from 30 vendors and 11 nonprofit exhibitors.

“It’s free admission, and the first 400 attendees are given the opportunity to pick up a free black chokeberry shrub seedling,” says MCMGA member Ed Kitchen, who co-chairs the Garden Fair committee. “We always give out some sort of native plant.”

MCMGA president Pam Roberts says the fair “feels like a gathering

of the community.” Items available for purchase include both indoor and outdoor plants and garden decorations like sculptures and windcatchers. A café run by MCMGA members also sells drinks, baked goods, and sandwiches.

“Where else can you get a piece of homemade pie that’s less than three bucks?” jokes Roberts.

Proceeds from the Garden Fair go toward funding the MCMGA grant program, which supports gardening projects throughout Bloomington. In 2024, the program helped the Bloomington Community Orchard update its informational signage, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Bloomington relocate and revitalize raised garden beds, and Bloomington Montessori School install native plants and protect wildlife, among several other projects.

“Our members are there and assisting with projects a lot of times,” says Roberts, who adds that MCMGA master gardeners also maintain gardens at Hilltop Garden and Nature Center, the Monroe County Courthouse, and WonderLab Museum of Science, Health, & Technology.

Roberts refers to becoming a master gardener as “a great journey.” Founded in 1989, MCMGA is sponsored by Purdue University and has about 85 members. To become a master gardener, local plant enthusiasts take a 16-week class on a variety of horticultural topics, including soil health, pests and predators, diseases, native versus invasive plants, vegetable gardening, tree pruning, and propagation.

“It’s a great course if you’re doing anything in the garden, or anything in your yard, or you just want to know more about the natural state of things,” says Roberts.

The course costs \$185 and is offered at the Monroe County Extension Office, 3400 S. Walnut.

Visit [mcmga.net](http://mcmga.net). ✨



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## What's Wrong with the Term 'Self-Advocate?'

As I was brainstorming potential topics for this issue's column, I kept circling back to the term "self-advocate" as it relates to the disability field, and why I have never been a fan of the term and why I think it needs to change.

First, let me explain what the term self-advocate means: In the world of disability, the term is used to describe a person with a disability who can and does advocate for themselves, who makes their needs and wants, likes and dislikes known to those

around them. Before I continue, let me also state that I recognize self-advocacy as a learned skill, and that there are some young people with disabilities who may not have the ability to advocate on their own behalf. I recognize that being able to advocate for oneself is a privilege, and I am grateful for it.

However, in college, I discovered something. If my friend without a disability needed to let a professor know that she would be out of class for a golf tournament and turned an assignment in ahead of time,

our professor never called her a "self-advocate" for doing so. She or he would just say, "Oh, thanks, Lauren. I'll have this back to you by Monday." Nor did any of them ever get recognized by this term if they had to be out of town due to a family emergency or other function. They were all simply called by their names.

So I started thinking, if they don't get recognized as a "self-advocate" for making their needs known to someone, then why do people with disabilities get a special title for doing the same sort of thing? Even if it is, for example, letting someone know they may need a quiet space to take a break due to sensory overload or needing materials presented in large print due to limited vision.

Certainly, if self-advocacy is a skill that a child or adult with a disability is currently working on, or just beginning to learn, and later is able to go out and use, definitely acknowledge that in some way. Be proud of them and congratulate them on their progress in a way that is meaningful to them. But I am not so sure that those of us with disabilities who do this necessarily need a special title for it. All the title says to me is: "You're a person with a disability."

Some people with disabilities may have unwanted attention drawn to them at times because of challenges resulting from their diagnosis. To me, the term "self-advocate" only serves to further the idea that people with disabilities are separate from the general population—that we are "different" and in a class all to ourselves. If we want to see inclusion for people with disabilities really advance, the practice of self-advocacy can stay for everyone, disabled or not—but the term itself needs to go. ✨

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# New Hope for Families Working to Prevent Homelessness

At any given time, New Hope for Families provides shelter for up to 12 families in Monroe County. Over the past year, the organization has intentionally shifted its focus, expanding prevention and diversion efforts that have served approximately 125 families, with more than 80% of those families avoiding homelessness entirely.

The goal is simple but ambitious: Ensure no child in the community sleeps outside and make stability “sticky” for families before a crisis escalates, says Emily Pike, executive director at New Hope. While nationally only about 31% of people exit homelessness permanently, New Hope’s average for families is 82%.

“For 10 years, New Hope existed in a space that was primarily reacting, because the only thing shelter can do is react,” Pike says. “We made a promise to the community that we wouldn’t let any family with children sleep outside.”

“For 10 years, New Hope existed in a space that was primarily reacting, because the only thing shelters can do is react,” says Emily Pike, executive director of New Hope for Families, which has intentionally shifted its focus toward prevention efforts.

*Photo by Morgan Kraemer*



These prevention efforts come at a critical moment for Indiana families. Over the past year, state and federal child care funding has been reduced significantly, placing additional strain on working parents.

“Not having child care is a leading cause of homelessness and an impediment to family stability,” Pike says. “We seek to interrupt the cycle by making sure families have access to safe and reliable child care.”

New Hope’s expanded model now includes prevention services for up to three years of follow-up support after a housing crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization partnered with the state on early intervention efforts, learning that even modest support delivered sooner can prevent homelessness altogether.

Families who have lived stably for years may suddenly face rising rents, steep application fees, or limited housing options in a tight market.

“These are families on the edge,” Pike explains. “Not only is it about outcomes for families, but it’s remarkably more cost effective to divert or prevent homelessness.”

Support can come in many forms, from help with utilities or groceries, application fees, or short-term family placements.

Once a family experiences homelessness, the risks multiply. Even as government support for child care has declined, New Hope continues to work alongside families, filling gaps, reducing trauma, and reinforcing a commitment to its youngest residents.

“The way we choose to care about young children says a lot about what’s important to us,” Pike says. —Brittany Marshall

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# MCCSC Committed to Recognizing Achievement And Investing in Success

At the Monroe County Community School Corporation (MCCSC), students, educators, and administrators share a common commitment to excellence, says MCCSC Superintendent Dr. Markay Winston.

This commitment takes place across classrooms, athletic fields, auditoriums, art studios, and countless other spaces at MCCSC, where students are encouraged to pursue their interests, build leadership potential, and become well-rounded individuals.

“Teachers are doing outstanding things in our classrooms every day, and we have inspiring students who are demonstrating talents that are just mind-boggling,” says Winston. “Commitment to excellence is about how well we celebrate what’s happening ... in every aspect of school.”

On February 5, MCCSC hosted its second annual Student Excellence Awards to celebrate the achievements of students, teachers, administrators, and the corporation. At the event, MCCSC honored one teacher from each school with a Teacher of the Year award and celebrated one student from each school for accomplishments in categories like visual and performing arts, school impact, and determination.

“That’s one very visible way to tell our story and celebrate our students,” says Winston. “The excitement, the enthusiasm, and the pride on the faces of our students being called to the stage to be celebrated for their expertise ... is amazing to see.”



Sounds of South performs at the inaugural Student Excellence Awards ceremony.  
Courtesy photos

During the event, Winston also delivered her annual State of the Schools address, which updated MCCSC students and families about districtwide progress toward three key priorities: achieving fiscal balance, sustaining academic excellence, and telling stories of excellence.

These priorities, which were identified by the Board of School Trustees, speak to MCCSC’s values of communication, transparency, and trust with the wider Bloomington community. To foster this relationship, MCCSC has invested in several new communication channels, including a district newspaper, a news website, a biweekly newsletter, and a financial transparency portal called “Every Dollar, Every Student,” which provides information to the public about the dollars and cents spent on public education in Monroe County.

“We want to be transparent around the dollars we’re getting, and how we are spending those dollars,” Winston says. “We want folks to know that we are good stewards and that we are using the dollars responsibly.”

To that end, MCCSC also released its Referendum Impact Report in 2025, which explores how funds from the 2022 and 2023 referenda have so far supported students of all ages, from preschool through high school graduation.

“I am eternally blessed and thankful and appreciative to our community for making this investment,” says Winston of the referendum.



MCCSC Superintendent  
Dr. Markay Winston.



MCCSC launched a new financial transparency portal at [mccsc.edu/everydollar](http://mccsc.edu/everydollar) that provides MCCSC financial information in clear and simple terms.



Two exciting areas of focus for the referendum dollars are early childhood education and school supplies. Thanks to this community investment, MCCSC is now able to provide free school supplies for every student in every school in the district, lessening what can often be a difficult financial burden on families.

“Families don’t have to go into their pockets [to fund these supplies],” says Winston. “We hear from our families that this is making a really big difference.”

In its first two years, the 2023 referendum has also more than doubled MCCSC families’ access to preschool and Pre-K programs. Today, more than 500 local 3- and 4-year-old children have access to free or low-cost early learning opportunities through MCCSC classrooms and six partner locations.

This access helps local families and the community by increasing kindergarten readiness, improving academic performance, boosting graduation rates, and giving parents and guardians the opportunity to pursue work and educational opportunities outside the home.

“Early childhood education is a direct investment into literacy and numeracy skills,” adds Winston. “The economic vitality of a community is strengthened as a result of [increased access to early learning].”

Looking toward the future, Winston says one major area of financial investment for MCCSC will be in creating state-of-the-art facilities that are safe, functional, and “designed and ready for the 21st century.”

From roof, plumbing, and other infrastructure upgrades to the construction of new academic, artistic, performing arts, and athletic resources like a turf soccer field at Bloomington High School South, tennis courts at Bloomington High School North, and an updated playground at Templeton Elementary School, MCCSC hopes to create spaces that help students connect to their schools, peers, and teachers both in and out of the classroom.

Studies show that participating in extracurricular activities helps students learn better, develop social skills, and graduate high school.

“We know that students who have a connection to school outside of academics excel more,” says Winston. “It’s all connected ... I want our students to be happy. I want them to know how to communicate effectively. I want them to know how to problem-solve.”

To keep the community up to date on these infrastructure goals, MCCSC will launch a new website with information about its Designing and Building to Sustain Excellence Initiative and ten-year Facilities Master Plan this year. This resource will outline the upgrades, repairs, and improvements taking place at MCCSC facilities in coming years.

With funding cuts to public education creating financial difficulties for school systems throughout the state, Winston stresses that these investments will not detract from resources invested in quality education at MCCSC.

“We’re not going to compromise on the quality of education we provide to our children,” she says. “We are going to continue to protect what matters most. We’re going to protect classroom instruction and student supports and student experiences. ... We want to be thoughtful about every dollar, every student, every day.”

Winston thanks the Bloomington community for their ongoing support of MCCSC, their investment in the 2022 and 2023 referenda, and their commitment to the value of education and learning.

Visit [mccsc.edu](http://mccsc.edu). —*Sophie Bird Murphy*



MCCSC preschool programs emphasize play-based learning. The 2023 referendum has also more than doubled MCCSC families’ access to preschool and Pre-K programs



Bloomington High School South’s new soccer field. The school corporation is investing in state-of-the-art facilities through its Designing and Building to Sustain Excellence Initiative. Zero referendum dollars are used in these facilities projects

# 'Freedoms Under Assault' Documentary Critical of IU Policies

The two local filmmakers of *Freedoms Under Assault* are working to make their documentary about alleged wrongdoing at Indiana University a tool to galvanize individuals and universities to protect academic freedom, free speech, and other freedoms in peril.



Co-director and producer Robert Arrove says the main purpose of the documentary, "is to inform and mobilize people." Photo by Jim Krause

"What we have here is the most complete documentation of the systematic dismantling of the principal features of an internationally prominent research university [Indiana University]," says co-director and producer Robert Arrove. "Our main purpose is to inform and mobilize people."

Among scenes portrayed in the film are protests in Dunn Meadow, campus vigils, snipers on the Indiana Memorial Union roof, and a rally outside the IU administration offices. Local photographer Jeremy Hogan of *The Bloomingtonian* provided many videos and historic footage, which are intermingled with interviews featuring IU professors, students, and faculty leaders.

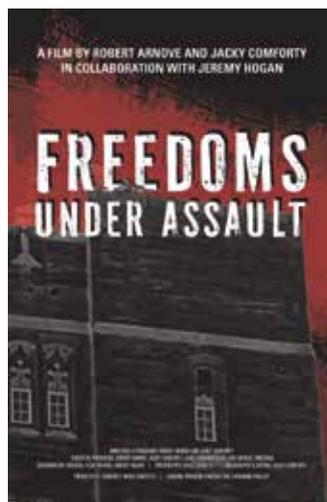
"We are going to continue documenting. We are not going to stop with this," adds Arrove, a Chancellor's Professor Emeritus of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at IU. He produced and co-directed

the film with Jacky Comforty, an acclaimed documentarian, oral historian, and book author.

The full-length documentary debuted in fall of 2025 before a packed house at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater. Viewers donated funds for initial production and distribution costs, says Arrove. Another public screening will occur in February or later.

The documentary also includes interviews with state legislators who are critical of IU policies and new state laws that make all IU trustees governor-appointed, and others that they say weaken faculty tenure, curtail student gatherings, and more.

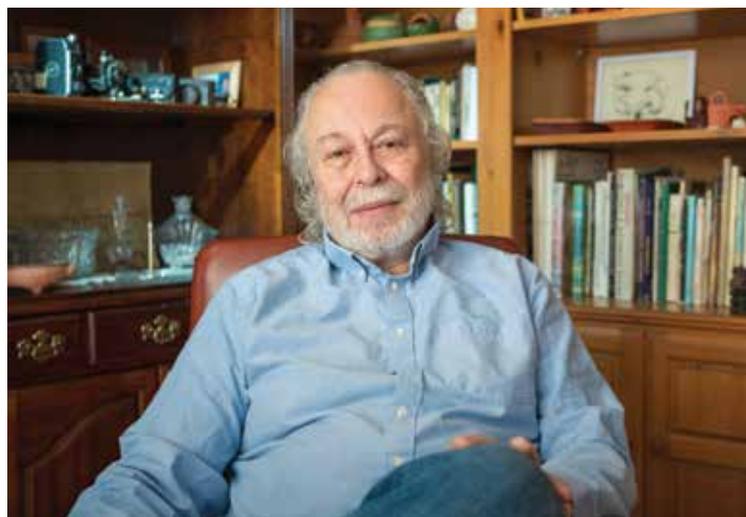
"What's being dismantled is institutional autonomy, shared governance structures,



tenure policies, academic freedom, constitutional rights of free speech and assembly, the viability of arts and humanities programs, and the existence of a DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] center and programs," Arrove says.

The filmmakers are reaching out to state and national organizations like the American Association of University Professors to offer the documentary.

Arrove explains his research shows that IU officials in the 1960s and '70s, including the dean of students, refused to comply with



Jacky Comforty, co-director and producer. Photo by Martin Boling

"unreasonable requests," such as identifying students in protest photos. It shows, he says, that "people can challenge what they consider unconstitutional policies."

Arrove alleges, "There is a fundamental assault on an institution absolutely essential to the formation of citizens and the continuing existence of democratic societies."

The film is available to view for \$3.99 at [magbloom.com/freedoms-under-assault](http://magbloom.com/freedoms-under-assault).

—Barb Berggoetz

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# B-town's University of Sewing Helps Women in Pakistan With Free Sewing Schools

By Brittany Marshall

What began as a small sewing and tailoring business in Indiana has grown into a life-changing movement for women in Pakistan.

After owning an alteration and tailoring shop for nearly 30 years, in 2018 Margaret Fette opened the University of Sewing, 611 W. 11th St., with the simple idea of selling apparel fabric and teaching people how to sew. That mission expanded dramatically in 2023 after her sewing machine repairman, Aaron Clausman, and his now wife, Nice Rose Clausman, helped establish the first sewing school in



The University of Sewing partnered with local leaders near Lahore, Pakistan, to offer free sewing schools for women trapped by generational debt. *Courtesy photos*



Pakistan while performing mission work there.

In Pakistan, civil debts as small as a few hundred dollars can result in debtor's prison, forcing entire families into indentured, bonded labor. Despite laws prohibiting the practice, enforcement is weak, especially in brick kilns and agriculture work, where exploitation and abuse, particularly of women, are widespread.

"Sewing is an unbelievable skill. If you know how to sew, there's nowhere in the world you can go and not be able to support yourself," says Fette. "No one should be in a place where they don't know how they will feed themselves and their families."

The University of Sewing partnered with local leaders near Lahore, Pakistan, to offer an alternative: free sewing schools for women trapped by generational debt.

"One of the first things we had to do was look for a talented instructor who knew how to teach the basic instructions of sewing, ▶



Margaret Fette, owner of the University of Sewing. *Photo by Haley Brown*





The school provides daily meals, professional training, and, upon graduation, a sewing machine

and all the advanced details as well,” says Nice Rose Clausman. “Once we obtained the funding for this, informing women of the opportunity was pretty easy, since a program like this was greatly in demand.”

The school provides daily meals, professional training, and, upon graduation, a sewing machine, giving women a path to income and independence. Each sewing cohort costs roughly \$2,000 to begin.

One graduate, Mehwish, 23, shared how the program transformed her future.

“I was born into an uneducated family and in a neighborhood where women were not respected or thought to rise to anything more. We owed \$400 for my mom’s medical treatment. I desired to learn skills, gain an education, and change the circumstances of my family.”

The six-month program taught her sewing, embroidery, pattern cutting, and garment construction. After graduating, Mehwish opened her own free sewing school at home.

“Because it changed my life, I want to change other’s lives, too. It’s not just a program, but a destiny for many women,” she says.

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# Amateur Radio in B-town

## Alive & Well & Doing Good



(above) Members of the Bloomington Amateur Radio Club (BARC) can meet strangers around the world, build emergency communications systems, make new friends, and more. *Courtesy photos*

Tingling with the same do-it-yourself spirit that sparked the birth of radio 130 years ago, members of the Bloomington Amateur Radio Club (BARC) find “seemingly endless ways to use amateur radio for both enjoyment and community service,” says club president Tom Henderson.

“We’re geeks,” he says, referring to himself and other “hams” (century-old slang for amateur radio operators).

At the basic level, hobbyists licensed by the Federal Communications Commission may build or buy amateur radio stations to talk to hams around the world, just as they did at the dawn of radio. Since 1912, hams are restricted to certain radio frequencies and are not permitted to broadcast music or to receive compensation.

“Meeting strangers around the world is magical,” says Rosalie White, public information officer for BARC, which began in 1967. “You never know who will answer the call to talk. It may be an astronaut, nurse, physics Nobel laureate Joe Taylor, teacher, Eagles singer Joe Walsh, carpenter, homemaker, or pilot.”

White also has her eyes on space, having co-founded the working group for ARISS—Amateur Radio on the International Space Station. ARISS enables students around the world

to speak directly with onboard astronauts.

More down-to-earth hams use their skills to build emergency communications systems, which require neither a cellular network nor a power grid.

For 25 years BARC has served thousands of cyclists in the annual Hilly Hundred. This year, volunteers built a control center at Edgewood High School in Ellettsville, which dispatched and monitored drivers to help riders in need.

“There’s an aphorism that amateur radio works when all else fails,” Henderson says.

Far from being past its prime, radio continues to be at the forefront of communications technology, according to Henderson, who was a computer researcher before retiring.

“Hams helped evolve the Internet. The cellphone antenna was invented by a ham. After 100 years, you might think it was all done, but honestly, it’s only beginning,” he says.

Above all, human connection rather than technology drives people to participate in BARC, whose membership includes people from all walks of life, all genders, and all ages.

“A typical ham radio experience is strangers becoming friends,” White said.

“And, we have lots of fun doing it,” Henderson adds.

—Aaron Cohen



Rosalie White (left), public information officer for BARC, is co-founder of ARISS—Amateur Radio on the International Space Station—which lets students around the world speak directly to astronauts.

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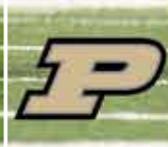
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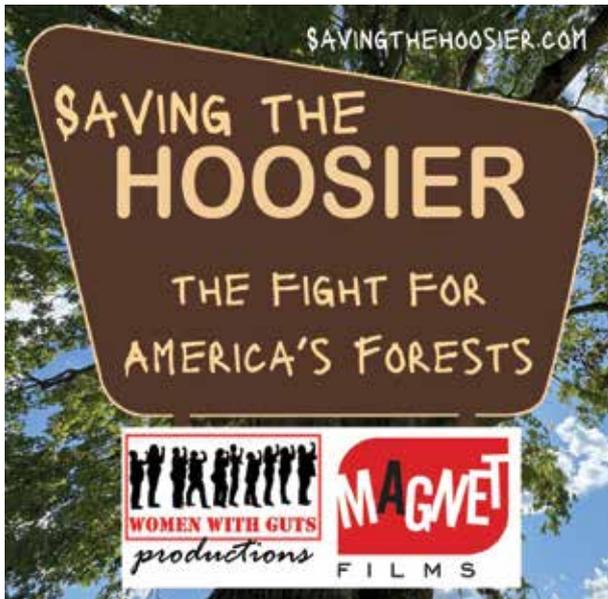


PURDUE

community

# 'Saving the Hoosier'

## A Documentary to Protect Our Forests



The documentary, *Saving the Hoosier: The Fight for America's Forests* outlines the U.S. Forest Service's latest proposal for logging and burning within Hoosier National Forest. *Courtesy photos*

by Susan M. Brackney

It's been decades since the Hoosier National Forest's trees were potentially on the chopping block, but now thousands of acres are again at risk for commercial logging. "Activists and politicians working together in the late '80s and early '90s put legislation in place to protect 'the Hoosier,' but, in 2021, the time was up," says Rachael Himsel. Himsel founded Women with Guts Productions and is the producer of the forthcoming documentary, *Saving the Hoosier: The Fight for America's Forests*.

The film outlines the U.S. Forest Service's latest proposal for logging and burning within Hoosier National Forest. The agency intends to commercially log more than 5,000 acres. It also seeks to conduct a prescribed burn of more than 15,000 acres and plans to apply chemical herbicides to about 700 acres of woods. To date, lawsuits filed by the Monroe County Commissioners, the Indiana Forest Alliance, Hoosier Environmental Council, and Friends of Lake Monroe have slowed the federal agency's progress.

The documentary features a diverse cast of local and nationally recognized characters, including the late environmental activist Andy Mahler. A founding member of Heartwood, the Indiana Forest Alliance, and Protect Our Woods, the 74-year-old Mahler was fighting anew to preserve the forest until his recent death, the result of Stage 4 cancer. "He was a force of nature," Himsel says. "His activism, his intellect, and his passion were the inspiration for the film."



Producer Rachel Himsel hopes the film will demonstrate that it's still possible to put differences aside for a common cause.

On-camera interviews with Mahler will be included in *Saving the Hoosier*, along with appearances by Jasper, Indiana, Mayor Dean Vonderheide, Friends of Lake Monroe President Sherry Mitchell-Bruker, and Monroe County Board of Commissioners President Julie Thomas, among many others.

Even Indiana Governor Mike Braun will have his say. Early last year, Braun urged the U.S. Forest Service to withdraw its plans,

citing the deleterious effects that logging and burning on steep slopes can have on area drainage and drinking water quality. He also noted, "The project area is treasured by Hoosiers. ... Its forests are a favorite destination for horseback riders, hikers, mushroom foragers, hunters, and campers."

Beyond documenting the struggle to protect the forest—not to mention its vast cave networks, endangered species, and cultural artifacts—Himsel hopes the film will demonstrate that it's still possible to put differences aside for a common cause. "I think this is actually an inspiring story," she says. "My hope is that others will see that it is possible to work across the aisle, and that we've been doing it for hundreds of years in this country. ... During the making of this film, I have seen people from all kinds of backgrounds working together."

Footage of *Hoosiers* screenwriter Anthony Pizzo and author Scott Russell Sanders also will likely be included in *Saving the Hoosier*, and Hud Mellencamp will narrate the documentary. Music by his father, John Mellencamp, along with other local performers Carrie Newcomer, Sarah Flint, Jeff Shew, Krista Detor, and Busman's Holiday will make up the soundtrack.

In addition to Himsel, David Yosha of Magnet Films co-directs *Saving the Hoosier*. (Yosha cut his teeth as a crew member on the 1986 classic *Hoosiers*.) The documentary's running time is expected to be between 60 and 90 minutes and Himsel intends to release *Saving the Hoosier: The Fight for America's Forests* by Earth Day 2026. In part, the timing of this crowd-funded project's debut depends on financial support.

To learn more or to donate, visit [SavingTheHoosier.com](http://SavingTheHoosier.com). ✨

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# Dave Askins at City Hall

of B Square Bulletin



## City Council Members Should Know Budget Facts

None of the City offices—like clerk, City Council member, and mayor—are up for election this year. The first chance to officially declare a run for City office is almost a year away.

But I'm writing about City Council races because the last two election cycles have featured candidates who seem to have little interest in municipal budgeting. That's too bad, because I think that financial oversight

is a big part of what that elected position is supposed to be about.

Sure, City Council hopefuls generally know enough about the job of City Council member to say at candidate forums that approving the annual budget is the most important thing the Council does. But a standard review of the financial condition of the city, based on easily accessible information, has never been integrated into

the council's workflow over the course of the year.

It's not uncommon for a Council member during a meeting to ask the city controller for information like the year-end balance of the TIF fund. A casual observer might think that such a Council member must surely take fiscal matters seriously. But when I hear a Council member ask that question, it tells me that they probably don't know the state of Indiana has an easy interface for running a report on the year-end fund balances for any local government.

The City's own public-facing online financial portal gives anyone, including Council members, an easy way to get answers to questions like: How much money on overtime has the police department spent so far this year? Questions from Council members typically treat staff like oracles for financial facts, instead of starting with those basic facts: Why did police overtime increase from \$1.68 million in 2024 to \$1.83 million in 2025?

After Bloomington's pending annexation cases come to a resolution this year, a big question will be: How much money has the City spent on annexation litigation since 2017? The City's online portal makes it easy to answer part of the question: \$2.1 million was paid to one outside law firm.

But that does not capture the hours worked by the City's own legal department. The City Council could require city attorneys to keep track of their hours and bill them to different projects—just like lawyers in private law firms do. Because the City Council doesn't demand that kind of reporting, the hours spent by city lawyers on annexation will be literally countless.

The mission of *The B Square Bulletin* includes providing an easy on-ramp to the workings of local government, giving everyone the information they need to contribute to Bloomington's civic life. That includes City Council candidates and residents whose votes they seek.

The next year's worth of *B Square* reporting could help ensure that the Bloomington City Council, and those who vote for them, understand the basics of the financial oversight role.

To make that possible, please consider making a contribution to *The B Square*. ✧



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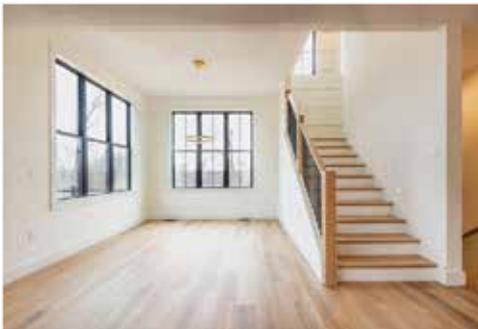




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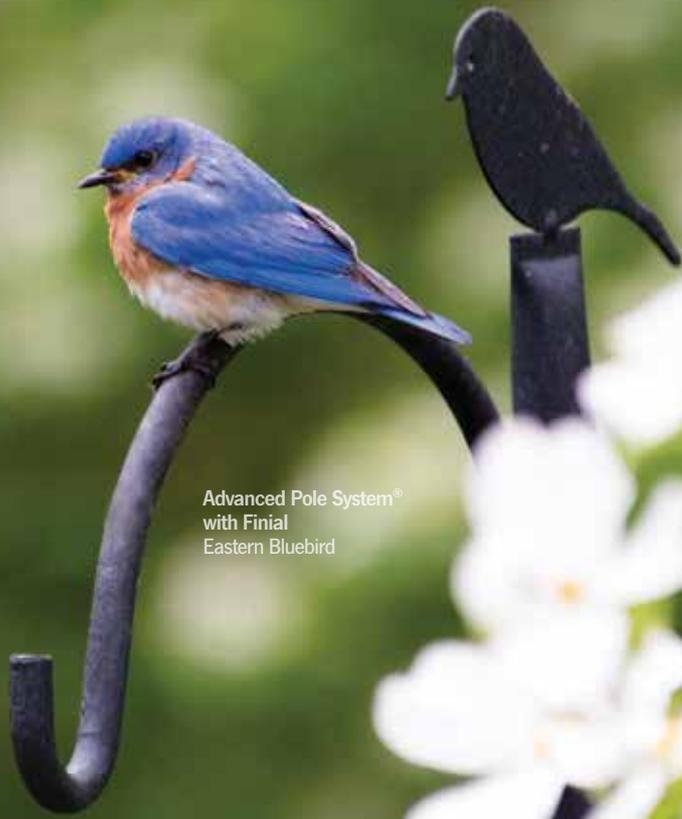


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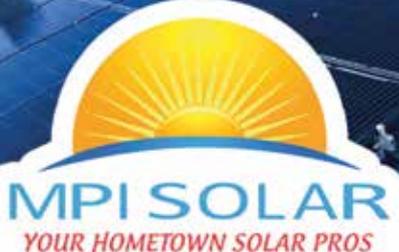
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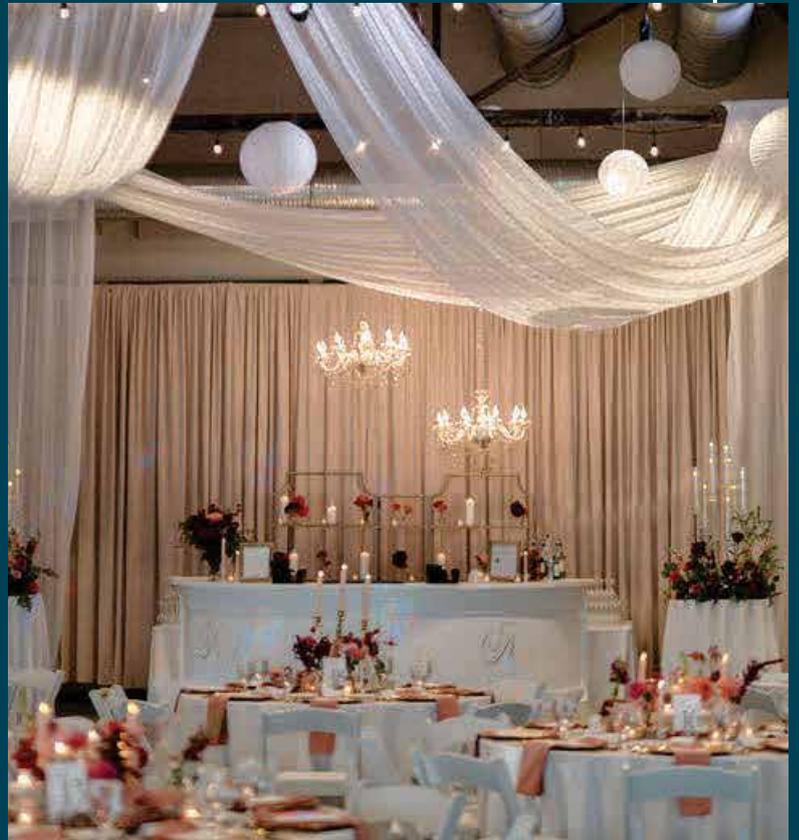


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On a fourth-and-4 quarterback draw from the Miami 12-yard line in the fourth quarter, Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza dives for what would become the game- and season-defining touchdown against the Hurricanes in the CFP Championship. Photo © John Mersits/Cal Sport Media, Cal Sport Media via AP Images



# IU WINS IT ALL!



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## RELIVE IT HERE IN PICTURES

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*by Jeremy Price | Photography by Jeremy Hogan*

Prior to the 2025 season, Indiana University football held a place in history, just not the kind anyone wanted to talk about.

But the Hoosiers, college football's all-time leader in losses when the season started, flipped the script by going 16-0 and winning the national championship. The postseason run began with a Big Ten championship over Ohio State and continued with College Football Playoff wins over a who's who in the sport—Alabama, Oregon, and Miami.

It has been a remarkable turnaround under head coach Curt Cignetti, who is now 27-2 in two seasons at IU. Success has followed Cignetti wherever he's gone—Google him.

In addition to Athletic Director Scott Dolson hiring a coaching savant, Indiana benefited from the changing landscape in college athletics and a real commitment to football.

Whether you credit the transfer portal, NIL and revenue sharing, or competitive salaries for not only the head coach but the assistant coaches—an increase of more than 56% since 2023—the result has shown on the field and in the stands.

IU football games have evolved from tailgate-only events to consistent sellouts. An enthusiastic fanbase traveled in droves during the College Football Playoff, giving the Hoosiers the homefield advantage from Pasadena to Atlanta to Miami.

And the team responded. IU WON IT ALL!

# ROSE BOWL

JANUARY 1, 2026

Going to the Rose Bowl was more than a College Football Playoff quarterfinal for the Indiana Hoosiers and their fans.

It was a generational dream fulfilled, and top-seeded IU didn't disappoint.

Playing in Pasadena for the first time in 58 years, the Hoosiers made the trip a worthwhile one with a 38-3 trouncing of Alabama, one of college football's bluebloods.

The game turned when the Crimson Tide were stuffed on fourth-and-1 at their own 35-yard line, setting up a touchdown pass from Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Fernando Mendoza (15) to Charlie Becker (80) for a 10-0 Indiana lead in the second quarter.

IU never looked back, leading 17-0 at halftime and pulling away in the second half to win its first bowl game since 1991.

Mendoza was 14-of-16 passing for 192 yards and three touchdowns, while running backs Kaelon Black (8) and Roman Hemby (1) combined for 188 yards and two touchdowns. Center Pat Coogan (78) was named offensive MVP.



**INDIANA 38, ALABAMA 3**

# **ROSE BOWL**



# PEACH BOWL

JANUARY 9, 2026



Fifth-seeded Oregon provided a familiar Big Ten foe in a rematch of a regular-season game Indiana won on the road, 30-20.

But with Cream and Crimson filling Mercedes-Benz Stadium for the Peach Bowl in what seemed like a home game, the Hoosiers administered a 56-22 thrashing to the Ducks en route to the College Football Playoff Championship game.

D'Angelo Ponds' (5) interception return for a touchdown on the first play from scrimmage set the tone, and even after Oregon answered with a score of its own, IU never let up on the way to a 35-7 halftime lead and a no-doubt victory.

Heisman-winning quarterback Fernando Mendoza was at it again, throwing five TD passes, but it was the defense that forced three first-half turnovers—headlined by Ponds' pick—that all turned into touchdowns, leaving the Ducks up a creek in Atlanta.



**INDIANA 56, OREGON 22**

# **PEACH BOWL**



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# NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP



Indiana may not have played the perfect national championship game, but the 27-21 win over Miami capped off a perfect season.

The Hoosiers finished 16-0, the first college football team to do so since Yale in 1894, and they did it 50 years after men's college basketball's last unbeaten national champions, the 1976 Indiana Hoosiers. They also completed the feat on their opponents' home field at Hard Rock Stadium, also home to the Miami Dolphins, the last undefeated NFL team in 1972.

IU never trailed in its three College Football Playoff games, jumping ahead 10-0 in the title tilt. Three times in the second half, the Hurricanes cut the deficit to three points, but the Hoosiers refused to wilt.

Miami pulled within 17-14 at the start of the fourth quarter, but IU answered. Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Fernando Mendoza hit Charlie Becker for 19 yards on fourth-and-5 to keep the drive alive, eventually setting up the play of the game.

Facing fourth-and-4 at the Miami 12, IU coach Curt Cignetti initially sent out the field goal team before calling a timeout. He then sent the offense back on the field. A quarterback draw sent Mendoza loping through the middle of the Miami defense, bouncing off tacklers and diving into the end zone for a touchdown that will live forever in Indiana sports history.

It still wasn't over until Jamari Sharpe's (22) interception with 44 seconds provided the perfect ending to a perfect season.



**JANUARY 19, 2026**

**INDIANA 27, MIAMI 21**



# NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP



**JANUARY 19, 2026**

**INDIANA 27, MIAMI 21**



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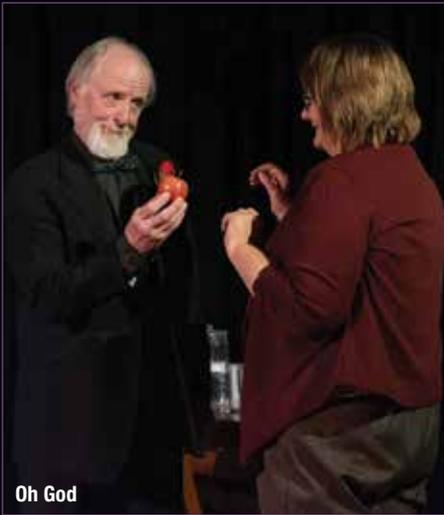




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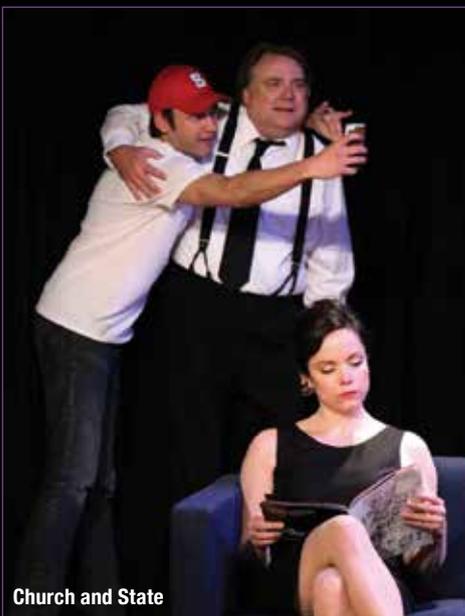
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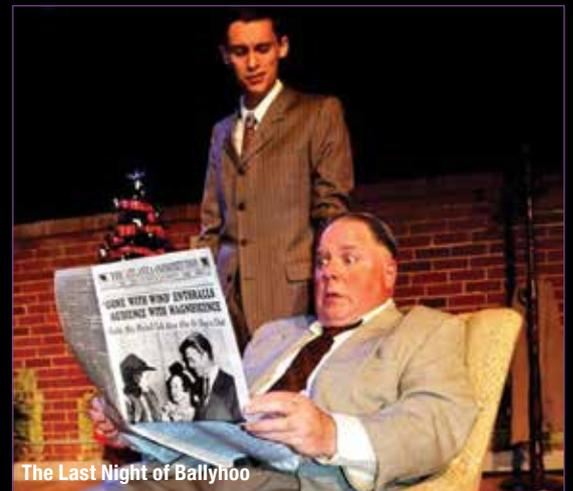
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The Wanderers



Jewish Theatre Bloomington (JTB) co-founder Audrey Heller (front) surrounded by the next generation of JTB leaders: (l-r) Linda Whitehart, president of the JTB board of directors; Darrell Ann Stone, producing artistic director; and Svetla Vladeva, managing director, photographed in the Rose Firebay Theater at the John Waldron Arts Center. Photo by Rodney Margison

# DESPITE TROUBLED TIMES JEWISH THEATER THRIVES



Founded 20 years ago  
**Jewish Theatre Bloomington**  
has survived and flourished

By Brittany Marshall

Although theater productions in Yiddish date back hundreds of years in Europe, they first came to the United States with the great Jewish influx at the turn of the 20th century. Yiddish plays flourished most notably on the Lower East Side of New York City. Jewish productions in English became prevalent as the 20th century progressed and assimilation took hold. They arrived in Bloomington 20 years ago.

From the beginning, Jewish Theatre Bloomington (JTB), has been focused on universal issues and the human condition, says co-founder Audrey Heller. At a time when the country is divided and xenophobia is rampant, JTB stands apart from the fray. Says Heller, “JTB is strictly a theater company, not affiliated with any Jewish organization or political entity, nor does it take any political stance.”

JTB’s dramatic performances are meant to be relatable to diverse audiences while illuminating aspects of Jewish life in the modern world. JTB has produced plays with themes including assimilation, antisemitism, white supremacy, the Holocaust, gun control, religion, immigration, and more. The one connecting thread, says Heller, is every play has a connection to Jewish life. ►



Since its inception, JTB has been a member of the Alliance for Jewish Theatre (AJT), an organization that is “dedicated to promoting and preserving Jewish theater that reflects the richness of Jewish life.” Although the Alliance has members across the country and worldwide, JTB is the only Jewish theater company in the state of Indiana.

Heller is the force who created and still nurtures the JTB. Now in her 90s, she retired last year as producing artistic director, giving way to her longtime “understudy,” Darrell Ann Stone. But Heller is still active on the JTB board and is play selection manager, heading a working committee that chooses the plays that will be considered for production.

### Heller’s story

Heller studied theater at New York’s Columbia University and received an M.S. in speech pathology from The Pennsylvania State University. For several years, she lived in North Dakota where she wrote and performed on radio programs before making her way to Bloomington with her husband, Ken, and two children in 1962. She worked for more than 20 years as an artistic director of a Bloomington-based social issues company, Diversity Theatre, and was active with Bloomington’s Puck Players Puppet Theatre. She was also on the clinical faculty of Indiana University’s Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences.

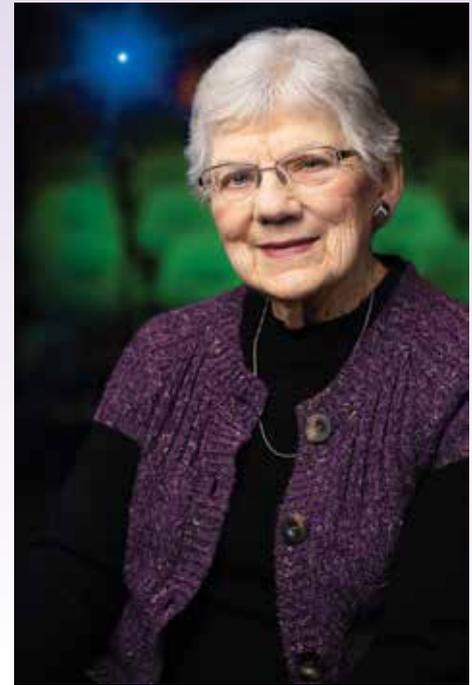
Remembers Heller, “When we came to Bloomington, there was no organized Jewish community. Having been brought up in a Jewish home and given a Jewish education, I wanted the same for myself and my children. I joined a group of others as one of the founders of Congregation Beth Shalom, which has become a flourishing synagogue.

“Over the years, I developed programs at the synagogue for Women’s History Month that highlighted contributions of notable Jewish women. At one of those readings, I met a new member of the congregation, an actor from Toronto, Bakol Gellar, and we began conversations about forming an independent Jewish theater company in Bloomington.”

In 2005 when Heller and Gellar founded JTB, the city’s theater scene was comprised of Bloomington Playwrights Project, Indiana University Theatre, and Monroe County Civic Theater. In 2006, Cardinal Stage and Stages Bloomington, known then as Bloomington Music Works, were born.

“Because I had been active in the small theater community by serving on boards like Bloomington Playwrights Project, IU Theatre, and others, I personally knew many involved in the local theater community, and all these contacts were valuable in helping JTB get started,” says Heller. “We knew that we wanted to foster a love for things relating to Jewish life in a city where Jews are a small minority.”

Three years later, Gellar moved away when her husband’s temporary appointment at Indiana University was up. Heller then invited Stone to be her unpaid co-artistic director. With a bachelor’s degree in theater and drama from Northeastern University in Boston, Stone brought decades of experience as a freelance theater artist, director, and actor to the job.



Audrey Heller co-founded JTB with Bakol Gellar in 2005. She says every play has a connection to Jewish life. Photo by Martin Boling

**“We knew that we wanted to foster a love for things relating to Jewish life in a city where Jews are a small minority.”**

### The plays are the thing

JTB plays are known to be thoughtful and thought-provoking with small casts but big themes. Finding and securing those plays often requires reading scores of playscripts.

Explains Heller, “The selection process has always begun by looking at what other Jewish theater companies are producing, along with productions with Jewish themes being done by non-Jewish theater companies all over the country and other English-speaking countries. We also accept submissions directly from playwrights.

“When I discover plays that I feel would be a good fit for our audience, I send them to a volunteer play reading committee for their comments and opinions. When we narrow the choices down to a few, I pass them on to our board of directors to read.”

The volunteer board, which consists today of almost equal numbers of Jews and non-Jews, operates in five working committees—development, publicity, finance, hiring, and play selection.

Linda Whikehart is the current president of the JTB board of directors. She came to the board a few years ago on the recommendation of her friend, board member Judith Rose. “Judith said that board members get to read the plays that are being considered for production. That was the hook for me. I like theater and the genre of playwriting.

“Being on the board is a very hands-on experience and it feels inclusive. Everyone pulls together to make the organization be its best. My first job on the board was chairing the development ▶



**“I can’t think of a better way to spend some of my retirement days than working with the competent people at the helm of JTB. Plus, I’m learning a lot about Jewish culture.”**

Linda Whikehart, current president of the JTB board of directors, which operates in five working committees—development, publicity, finance, hiring, and play selection.  
Photo by Rodney Margison

committee. Audrey Heller was the producing artistic director at the time, and she asked me to take the job. It’s hard to say no to Audrey.

“I became president in October 2024,” says Whikehart. “I can’t think of a better way to spend some of my retirement days than working with the competent people at the helm of JTB. Plus, I’m learning a lot about Jewish culture.”

### In the beginning

In the early days, rehearsals were held in the living rooms of Heller and Stone, sets and tech were minimal, and no one got paid.

*Chaim’s Love Song*, a Jewish-American comedy by Marvin Chernoff, was JTB’s first production, held at the John Waldron Arts Center’s Firebay Theater. Chaim is an old Jewish man, a retired

mailman, who tells his life story to a young Gentile woman sitting on a park bench in Brooklyn. A hit, the play was also performed in South Bend.

One of the company’s most notable productions was *Hiding in the Spotlight* by local author Greg Dawson, an original piece that JTB choreographed as a staged reading at Unitarian Universalist Church in 2011. Dawson, a well-known journalist, wrote the play about his mother, Holocaust survivor Zhanna Dawson, who was a faculty member at the IU School of Music.

Today, dress and tech rehearsals take place in theaters, sets are elaborate, tech is complex, and actors, staff, and playwrights are all paid. JTB utilizes Actors’ Equity Association for many of its leading players and hires professionals from Chicago, Indianapolis, and other cities, as well as local professional actors, and from IU’s Department of Theatre, Drama, and Contemporary Dance and the IU Jacobs School of Music.

What Heller describes as “exceptional artistry” is what brings audiences—Jews and gentiles in equal numbers—to JTB performances.

It is noteworthy that when so many theaters and theater companies went dark during the pandemic, JTB did not—producing staged readings on Zoom. ▶



The JTB board of directors: (front row, l-r) Iris Kiesling, Darrell Ann Stone, Danielle Bruce; (back row, l-r) Stan Wasserman, Svetla Vladeva, Ramsay Hasik, Ray Hedin, Audrey Heller, Linda Whikehart, Malcolm Abrams, Harlan Lewis. (Not pictured: Judith Rose, Tom Kramer.) Courtesy photo



Darrell Ann Stone became JTB's producing artistic director in January 2025. *Courtesy photo*

**“What time is any keener than now to provide works that help the community focus on the universal human condition. It helps us all feel human together and to better understand and accept each other.”**

Considering the divisions in America and the world at this moment, Stone ponders, “What time is any keener than now to provide works that help the community focus on the universal human condition. It helps us all feel human together and to better understand and accept each other.”

The first production under Stone’s headship was *4000 Miles* by Amy Herzog, directed by Bill Simmons. The play had already received numerous accolades, including the Obie Award for Best New American Play.

Also featured this season was *The Price* by famed playwright Arthur Miller, exploring the complex impact of identity, familial loss, interpersonal dynamics, and obligation. Directed by Dale McFadden, professor emeritus in IU’s Department of Theatre, Drama, and Contemporary Dance, the production ran from November 6–16, 2025. All performances were sold out. ▶

Over the years, JTB has hosted fundraisers in support of each show. In the early years, these events were exclusively for JTB donors and subscribers but more recently they’ve been open to the public.

## Passing the torch

On January 2, 2025, after nearly 20 years at the helm, Heller and the board entrusted the JTB leadership to Stone, now the company’s first paid producing artistic director. Stone has worked with JTB almost since the start, as co-artistic director with Heller, artistic advisor, board member, “talkback” facilitator, director, and actor.

Stone has a master of social work degree from IU and worked for 26 years at the university, the last six as director of the student advocates office, plus part-time, associate faculty in the IU School of Social Work teaching undergraduate and graduate courses. She retired in November 2024 to take the JTB position.

“One of the first things I’ve done since taking on this role is to make the fundraisers public,” says Stone. These have included performances by singer-songwriters Krista Detor and Carrie Newcomer and a storytelling show featuring, among others, retired opera star Sylvia McNair. In August, in coordination with the Hundredth Hill Artist Retreat, JTB presented four performances of Frank Ferrante’s nationally acclaimed *An Evening with Groucho* (Marx).

All of these fundraising events were sold out.

Since its first show, JTB has facilitated talkbacks after each production to allow open dialogue within the community. Talkbacks are led by panels of actors, directors, rabbis, ministers, community activists, faculty in IU’s Borns Jewish Studies Program, and more.

“I’m a social worker by profession, and to me bringing people together to talk about our productions is important,” says Stone. “Our talkbacks are different because they allow people to have a voice about what they have just seen, to learn, and to grow.”



In August, in coordination with the Hundredth Hill Artist Retreat, JTB presented Frank Ferrante’s *An Evening with Groucho* (Marx). *Photo by Rodney Margison*



JTB celebrated its 20th anniversary in November 2024 at the Monroe Convention Center, honoring Audrey Heller and her legacy. *Courtesy photo*

## Looking to the future

At age 20, JTB is a larger but still small professional theater company. It has three paid employees—Stone, Managing Director Svetla Vladeva, who came on board three years ago, and newcomer Jensyn Bowman, administrative assistant, replacing Kathleen McConahay who retired last year.

Ticket sales remain a small percentage of the income, with the company continuing to offer affordable prices at \$35 a ticket. Fundraisers, donations, and grants make up the bulk of the revenue. In 2026, JTB is hoping to attract long-term donors both for its general fund and for the Audrey Heller Fund, an endowment established to finance the position of producing artistic director into the future.

This year’s spring play is *Your Name Means Dream* by José Rivera, directed by Martha Jacobs, starring Bloomington audience favorite Diane Kondrat—returning from Oregon for the role—and Valerie C. Kilmer. The play highlights the complexities of humanity in the age of artificial intelligence. Performances will be held at The Waldron’s Rose Firebay May 7–17.

The fall show, *Prayer for the French Republic* by Joshua Harmon, will be directed by Kendrick Weingast. The play is an award-winning family drama about the legacy of antisemitism, also at the Rose Firebay November 5–15.

“Audiences can expect to see well-acted and -directed productions that bring to light a stimulating concept, theme, or point of view, and that at the end of the play they will be left with something to think about, be excited about, and to talk about,” says Heller. “It’s my hope that audiences will continue to be emotionally moved or intellectually simulated.”

Like almost every Jewish organization in the United States today, JTB employs security personnel at all its productions and fundraisers.

In these difficult times, with antisemitism in the United States and around the world at the highest levels since the 1930s, Jewish theater is more important than ever. Says Stone, “We’re not about dividing but bringing people together. We’re not here to make statements. We believe in continuing to highlight what unites us, which is what it’s like to live and breathe.”

Find tickets and learn more at [jewishtheatrebloomington.com](http://jewishtheatrebloomington.com). ✧



Jewish Theater Bloomington will stage *Your Name Means Dream* (left) in May at the John Waldron Arts Center, and *Prayer for the French Republic* (right) in the Fall. *Courtesy images*



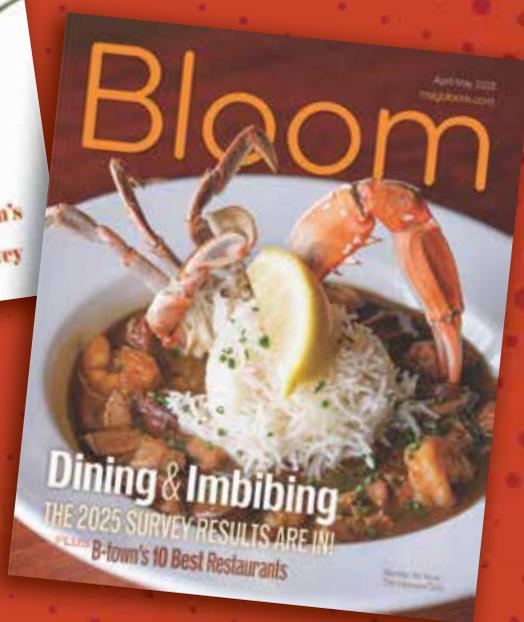
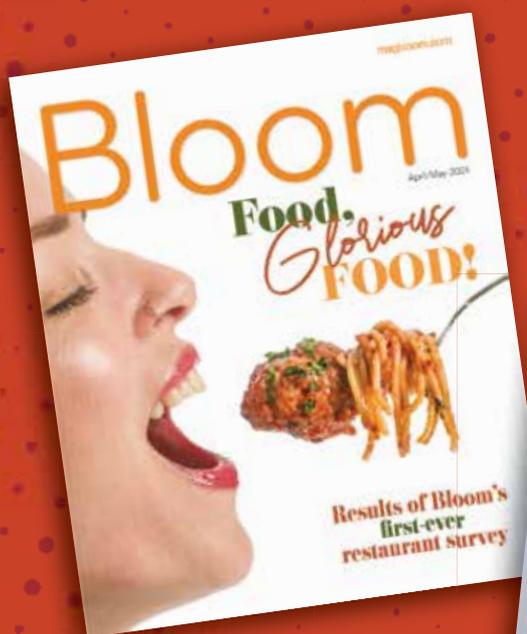
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