

JEFFERSON
EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

2026 ANNUAL
REPORT

Dear Jefferson Member,

I was a young child living in Kosovo under Slobodan Milošević's tyranny. Access to the American way of life was tightly restricted and for many minorities effectively prohibited. Why? Not because of America's power or wealth, but because the idea of America is dangerous to tyrants. A "shining city on a hill" teaches people they can choose their own destiny – and that is the beginning of the end for tyranny.

Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus," inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty with its often-quoted line, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," became part of my family's story. It led us to Erie, Pennsylvania. I didn't know the poem then, but I felt the pull: not Europe or another Western country, but America – the place that asks not your ethnicity, religion, or creed and instead offers opportunity.

In 1999, my family was given a second chance at life. For the first time, I tasted freedom. Because education and opportunity made that possible, I have dedicated my life to preserving this haven for humanity.

At the Jefferson Educational Society, supported by a remarkable Board of Trustees, an exceptional team, and committed friends, we work to remind those who live here what this country means to the world and future generations.

I have also come to believe that July 4, 1776, is among the most important dates in human history. Before that day, most of humanity lived under autocracies, where ordinary people had little say in the governments that ruled them. The Declaration rekindled the idea that people can govern themselves – an idea the world had struggled to sustain since the fall of the Roman Republic with Cicero's death centuries earlier.

Because of that spark, billions now have a voice in how they are governed. That is why the Jefferson Educational Society has made 2026 a year of focused programming to commemorate America's founding and examine the story of the United States since 1776. We began with educational programming on the nation's founding and early challenges in the 18th century. This spring will focus on the 19th century – the Civil War, the Industrial Revolution, and America's rise as a world power. Summer will turn to the 20th century: two world wars, women's suffrage, and the continuing struggle to align our nation with its self-evident truths – that all are created equal.

We will conclude with the Global Summit, examining the current state of the American experiment and exploring what it will take to build a more just society.

We hope you will join us so we can keep the candle lit for the next 250 years.

Sincerely,



Ferki Ferati, Ed.D.
President
Jefferson Educational Society



LIFTING OUR COMMUNITY *Rising* WITH PURPOSE

The Jefferson Educational Society reached many milestones in 2025, serving our community in numerous ways. Our main campus on State Street and satellite locations – ECAT, Harborcreek, Corry, and Fairview – offered programming on issues important to our region nearly every day.

Our publications set new records with articles, books, and studies rivaling think tanks in cities far larger than Erie. Andy Roth wrote the book "How to Be a Highly Effective Leader: A Primer," a must-read for aspiring leaders for release in 2026. Our Scholars-in-Residence also published articles covering history, health, politics, leadership, demography, and other topics relevant to northwestern Pennsylvania.

The 17th Global Summit broke attendance records and featured a conversation with former President Barack Obama. The sold-out event reached millions worldwide online and on TV. Neil deGrasse Tyson's presentation attracted thousands eager for the latest discoveries. Ambassador Michael McFaul offered insight on Russia, China, and the global order, while former Vice President Mike Pence and Paul McNulty discussed faith, religion, and American politics. A mayors' panel explored local innovation and solutions to urban challenges. The summit concluded with genealogy insights from Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Our partnership with Gannon University continues to flourish, hosting several events in the Yehl Room at Waldron Campus Center. Collaboration with C-SPAN and SiriusXM allows us to reach Jeffersonians across the country, and more than 1,000 hours of programming are available on YouTube.

The Brock Institute continues the mission started by the Rev. Charles Brock, with Steve Scully as director. Responding to community interest, the JES is offering more courses and discussion groups. Later this year, the Jefferson Speakers Bureau will launch, expanding access to Jefferson-style programming nationwide.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of American independence, the Jefferson is hosting events with world-class performers and educators who bring history to life. While we continue addressing urgent local, national, and global issues, many programs this year will focus on celebrating America's independence and democracy.

The JES leadership, staff, and volunteers can take pride in what they have accomplished with limited resources. Kudos to President Dr. Ferki Ferati and the entire team for another job well done.

The JES would not have achieved this success without the generous support of our community.

Thank you for helping us fulfill our mission of providing a forum for scholars, community leaders, and citizens to discuss, learn, and collaborate for the common good.

Sincerely,



Baher Ghosheh, Ph.D.
Chair
JES Board of Trustees



Education for a Stronger Democracy

IN 2025, JES BROUGHT THOUSANDS TOGETHER TO LEARN, QUESTION, AND LEAD, PROVING THAT INFORMED CITIZENS REMAIN THE FOUNDATION OF A THRIVING REPUBLIC.

As the United States of America enters its 250th year as an independent nation, we stop and reflect on the vision of our Founding Fathers. At the Jefferson Educational Society, one of those founders sticks out above the rest: “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free,” said Thomas Jefferson, “it expects what never was and never will be.” His vision of preserving liberty has always hinged on his belief that education of the masses is necessary. At a time when people may feel overwhelmed by national and global problems, disconnected from decision-making, and begin to lose trust, education is a powerful tool to regain control. As Jefferson said, “Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.”

The visions of the founders that set forth the United States of America remain, of course, a work in progress. Over the past year, the JES worked to serve its mission to provide education and information to the community by serving as a gathering place where those who may not always see eye to eye can gather shoulder to shoulder -- and even screen to screen in the 21st century -- to learn from and with one another through programs, publications, and more. A look back on the past year offers reflection to power the work ahead.

In 2025, when nearly 8,000 people gathered at Erie Insurance Arena to hear from former President Barack Obama in September or when over 3,000 packed into the Bayfront Convention Center to hear from Neil deGrasse Tyson, they weren't just attending Global Summit events; they were practicing engaged citizenship. When the JES's Civic Leadership Academy researched population decline and proposed viable solutions, cohort members weren't just completing an assignment; they were serving their community. Citizens do have agency, and good citizenship leverages education and civic engagement to maintain the freedom that has defined our country for 250 years. The JES exists to cultivate those ideals.

Education remains at the forefront of our mission, and this year, the Jefferson not only hosted 64 programs at its headquarters in Erie, but it hosted 55 programs at its satellite locations -- the Corry Higher Education Council, Erie Center for Arts & Technology, Lincoln Community Center Library, and at the Harborcreek Township municipal building -- and posted over 125 videos to its YouTube channel as an online viewing option to make

programming accessible. Global Summit XVII brought together over 15,000 people for 17 events, where participants learned about politics from former Vice President Mike Pence and former Ambassadors Michael McFaul and Mark Gitenstein, while Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback Jim Kelly and St. Bonaventure's Adrian “Woj” Wojnarowski talked sports, and Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Juan Williams spoke about history and its impact on people today, among many others. Awarded the Thomas B. Hagen Dignitas Award, Dr. Jane Arbuckle Petro returned to her roots in Erie to speak about the empathy and humility that drove her to perform surgeries on all seven continents, mostly on mission trips to serve otherwise underserved populations.

Robert Garland, the Roy D. and Margaret B. Wooster Emeritus Professor of the Classics at Colgate University, returned to the JES stage for another week-long residency in 2025. Garland, who first presented in Erie during 2023's Global Summit and premiered the JES's first-of-its-kind week-long residency in 2024, spent his week in 2025 exploring “turning points” in history, actions that in the course of a day changed our lives forever.



Mary Lincoln, dear friend of JES, Dr. Robert Garland, and JES team members, Chelsea Oliver and Christine Gerlock, enjoyed Asbury Woods' Wine in the Woods event during Garland's Speaker-in-Residence week in Erie.

In 2025, the JES doubled down on residencies, hosting a second with Jay Cost, acclaimed author and the Gerald R. Ford Nonresident Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Cost spent his week examining the period of the American founding, the era in which the United States established a new constitutional order, through the perspectives of those who lived and shaped it to appreciate its full complexity.

That complexity is something that we continually talk about and break down in the publications division. This year, the JES produced 88 publications on a wide range of subjects.

JES Scholars-in-Residence Parris Baker, Diane Chido, David Frew, and Andy Roth all continued their widely-read respective series, “Truth in Love,” “The Wider World,” “On the Waterfront,” and “Book Notes,” looking at local, national, and global history and news of the day. JES Scholar-in-Residence and Ukrainian native Lena Surzhko-Harned focused a series on international relations that drew lessons from failed democratization and what they stand to teach about democratic erosion today.

JES copy editor Chloe Forbes also debuted a series about the collapse of the traditional news model and what it looks like for that model to evolve in a digital age. She wrote of various solutions that are beginning to emerge to maintain trust, information, and connectedness, and how citizens must play a role in this media revolution, at a time when many newsrooms continue to shrink, if not shutter.

The Men in Crisis series also took shape in 2025, with JES contributor Jeff Bloodworth

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Dr. Jay Cost joins JES Vice President Ben Speggen for a quick picture during his Speaker-in-Residence week at the JES.

bringing to the forefront the social crises that plague modern men, driving some to succumb to despair. The first four entries included voices from various scholars on the history of masculinity and how culture and politics have changed the picture.

In 2025, the JES produced three Tribute profiles: Thomas B. Hagen: A Study in Leadership; The Story of Denise Illig Robison Mullen; and Bruce Raimy: Businessman and Civic Leader. Each tribute dived into the history and importance of each person to the Erie region and beyond with their many contributions.

These profiles are powerful reminders of how good citizens act. Like President Theodore Roosevelt said, "The first requisite of a good citizen in this republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his weight."

The JES strives to create space for people to enter the arena rather than criticize it. Roosevelt's philosophy that citizenship requires effort, learning, and participation, rather than spectatorship, shapes the "think tank" work of the JES, evident with its adult, lifelong learning-styled programming – from its Community Conversations series that connects residents with leaders and stakeholders for updates and idea-sharing on local-level initiatives, ideas, and action, to the wide range of lectures presented by local and regional scholars and experts.

It also includes the various courses the JES offers. In 2015, the JES again partnered with the Foreign Policy Association to offer "Great Decisions," a seminar-styled course in which participants dive into critical global issues with national- and local-level implications. The JES also continued its longest-standing course, "Great Conversations," in which attendees read a range of materials – from the classics to notable contemporary works.

Roosevelt said, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." The JES seeks to expand what tools Erie area residents have at their disposal to become educated and

create change – and that means working with others for the greater cause. In 2025, the JES partnered with many local organizations to provide programming and scholarship, including the Hagen History Center, Gannon University, Erie's Black Wall Street, and Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM) to expand upon its offerings at the benefit of the larger community.

Further engaging with all corners of the community, the JES took the step after education – action – as the JES's Civic Leadership Academy welcomed its largest class of nearly 30 participants this year. JCLA cohort members met with state and local officials to understand the issue of population decline and how best to adapt to the current moment of loss in the hopes of building a better future. The JES understands that everyone needs a voice in that future and provides scholarships so young people in the field can take part in JCLA, as well as provide free admission to all programming, including Global Summit events, for students. JCLA is for younger professionals to learn leadership skills through group action in the community while the Raimy Fellowship Program enables JCLA participants to research and act on a practical policy problem of their interest.

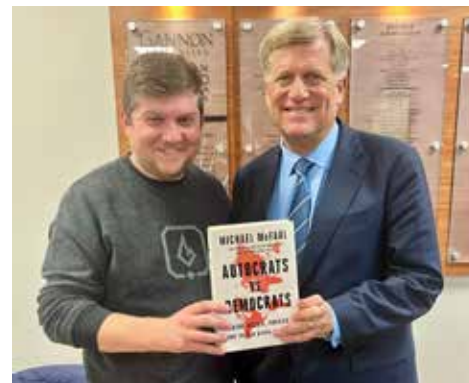


JES Scholars-in-Residence, Dr. David Frew and Dr. Andy Roth enjoy a "Bayrats and Bookworms" themed cake after their celebratory presentation of their 200 publications, each.

In 2025, Raimy Fellowship graduate Bradley Thompson presented his research on "Multi-Generational Leadership: Guiding Age-Diverse Work Groups," focusing on how to bring people together. Raimy Fellow Sarah McCall made the case for "The Role of Public Libraries in Addressing the Loneliness Crisis," and Fellows Jacob Jones and Katie Phillips teamed up to raise up "Hidden Voices: The Unheard Struggles of Students."

Alyson Eagle hosted a day-long workshop for women in leadership as part of her "Still We Rise: Overcoming the Barriers of Aspiring Female Leaders" project. Kathryn DiVittorio was motivated by her fellowship project, "Realizing the Need for an Autism Support School and Hub in Rural Pennsylvania," that she opened her own rural autism support center in Corry.

Each of these successes are examples of how citizens who play the role of problem-solver can make more of a difference than mere consumers of government services. President



Kyle Churman, co-owner of Werner Books, smiles with Michael McFaul after his Global Summit event and book signing.

John F. Kennedy said, "Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer." The JES aims to achieve those answers and that feeling of control in today's social, economic, and political climate. We can't do it alone, though.

If the protection of our rights lasts only as long as the performance of our responsibilities, it falls to us to continue using our liberties to their full potential through staying informed and making sure that future generations have that chance, too. The Agora Circle is a community of our most engaged and visionary supporters who believe in the JES mission to promote civic enlightenment and drive community progress through education, dialogue, and leadership, and want to see it sustained – and in 2025, both the number of members and their support grew since its launch in 2024. These members understand what Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Kennedy all knew: democracy is not automatic. It requires investment – of time, talent, and resources.

As we reflect on America's first 250 years and the JES's first 18 years, particularly the most recent years, we see clearly that the arc of progress bends toward communities that choose education over complacency, engagement over apathy, and action over complaint. In 2025, Erie chose wisely. Thousands participated in programs, engaged in dialogue, researched solutions, and supported civic infrastructure. They proved that citizens *do* have agency, that local action *does* create change, and that informed dialogue *does* build stronger democracy.

The work continues. And we invite you to be part of it – whether by attending a program, reading our publications, participating in JCLA, or joining the Agora Circle.

Because, as Jefferson reminded us, the people are "the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty." And the Jefferson Educational Society remains committed to ensuring those people are educated, engaged, and empowered. Here's to the next 250 years and the ongoing work of citizenship that will define them.

JEFFERSON MEMBERSHIP

Be informed. Be heard. Be a part of our community. Become a member.

Members are the backbone of the JES. We began humbly in 2008 with 91 members and have grown to over 1,000 members, partners, and donors who are committed to life-long learning through perspective-expanding civil dialogue.

We value the support and belief in our mission that our members afford us to continue reaching the Erie Community and beyond. Through this generosity, we are making a positive difference in the region. We are grateful for the community we continue to build and welcome you to be a part of it.



A full house for a lecture in the JES Hall.

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Bruce Behringer
Steven Beningo
Mary Jane Blair
John Bowers
Marilyn Brown
Noel Burgoyne
Mary Grace Calabrese
Yvonne Caputo
Gary Cardot
Amelia Carr
Karen Chillcott
Jon Chisholm
Helen Christensen
Deborah and Dennis Christopher
Molly Cipriani
Kim and Thomas Clear
Karen Clement
Barbara Conner
Rock Copeland
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Tim Criscione
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Mary Ann D'Annibale
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Natalie Dwyer-Haller
Eileen Engel
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Sean Flook
Denise and John Foltz
Robert and Claire Foster
Rev. Leo Gallina
Mary Geib
Marcia Gensheimer
Elizabeth Gill
Nancy Gittere
Bob and Toni Griffith
Diane Guthrie
Debra and Richard Haire
John Harkins
Robert Hass
Nancy Herold
Daniel Hesch
Stacey Hetrick
Pat Howell
Suzanne Hudson
Rubye and Jeffrey Husband
Barbara Hutzelman
Steven Hyzer
Christine Jarema

"Erie is so fortunate to have the JES in our community.

THERE IS SO MUCH TO BE GAINED BY ATTENDING JES LECTURES AND COURSES – NOT ONLY IS THE ATTENDEE EDUCATED BUT ALSO ENTERTAINED IN SOME CASES. THE JES OFFERS SUCH TIMELY TOPICS AND UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES YEAR-ROUND."

- KAREN MILLER, MEMBER SINCE 2017

"The JES has proven to be a consistently outstanding resource to us."

WE APPRECIATE THE CALIBER OF SPEAKERS, THE BREADTH OF TOPICS AND THE DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT THAT WE HAVE FOUND IN THE MANY EVENTS WE HAVE ATTENDED. JES IS TRULY AN EXCEPTIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCE AND ONE REASON WE ARE CERTAIN THAT WE MADE A GREAT DECISION CHOOSING TO RETIRE IN ERIE, PA." - ANN & SHELDON PENTZ, MEMBERS SINCE 2020

Marie Jarema
Candice and John Kemp
Eric and Sue Kisch
Ed Kissell
Mary Kissell
Susan Knapp
Leigh Kostis
Anne Marie Kumhera
Joseph Kwashnak
Cheryl Lamb
BJ and Barb Lechner
Theresa Letkiewicz
Judith Libbey
Patty Lightner
Juan Llarena
Kathy Mastantuono
Larry Mays
Judy Meyn
Hayes Miller
Julie Monocello
Susan Murawski
Diane Murphy
Steven Nachman
Lori Nemenz
Gary Nichols
Janice Nuber
Nancy Oneill
Josie Osiecki
Darrell Owens
Kathleen Pae
Benita Panighetti
Janiece Peck
Karen Pettit
Jeanne Phillips
Marilyn Pol
Marilyn Reiser
Suzanne Richard
Victoria Rickard
Tim Riley
Charles and Susan Roehrl
Sarah Roncolato
Cedric Rowley
Dan Rowley
Patricia Rowley
Carolyn Ruth
Marian Sama
David Sawtelle
Diana and Ray Schaney
Suzanne and Charles Scheuer
Leone
Karen Schwarzwald
Steve Sensor
Karen Sheppard
Jerome and Alma Jean
Skrypzak
Gretchen Smith
Marlene Smith
Chris Snedden
Anita Snider
Michael Spizarny
Mark and Rhonda Steg
Linda Stevenson
Lenora Stull
Jeff Styborski
Michael and Karen Sullivan
Bonnie Tarcia
Andy Tellers
Christopher Thomas
Suzanne Todd
Becky Lynn Taravis
Mary Tredway
Renee Uht
Dave Ungerman
Deborah Vahanian
Richard and Diane Valahovic

Gwendolyn White
Becky Widdecombe
Linda Williams
Marian Wygant
Edward Zajac
Susan Zoky

JEFFERSONIAN

Fred Adams
Elaine Addressi
James Arndt
Charles Baird
Joseph Baniszewski
Karen Benko
Gregory Blackman
Nicloe Bolash
Kyrsten Boutwell
Jack and Deborah Bovee
Maureen Bradley
Janet Britt
Nancy Brown
Nicholas Brown
Adrian Byler
Carol Byler
Xin-zhu Chen
Sandra Chermack
Diane Chido
Bree Chrisman-Wise and Marlene
Spires
Christine Colao Nickson
Alva Covington
Jim Cuneo
Kevin and Mary Cuneo
Pat and Robin Cuneo
Darrell Cyphers

Mike Dailey
Mark Dalglish
Judy Dauson
Pat Davis
Barbara and Kirk DeMichele
Matthew and Stephanie Dennison
Jack and Kim Dile
Michael Dodds
Pauline Drozeski
Marie Duke
Ruthie Eckert Cacchione
Julie Faulkner Kean
Gloria Forrest
Shawne Fried
Vernon and Martha Gambill
Kenneth Gamble
Michael Ganske
Joe and Anna Gehringer
Victoria Gensheimer
Helen and David Gesue
Julie Gentry
Patricia George
Jason Gochoco
Renee Gordon
Bill and Shelia Grove
Kenneth Grugel
Cathleen Hedderick
Michael Hill
Gilbert Jacobs
Jackie Johnson
Allison Kaverman and David Palotas
Kenneth Kraut
Agnes Kudlock
Mary Kuhar-Rinke
Lawrence Kuklinski

Richard Lamb
Kirk Lavins
Art Leopold
Bob Lewis
Anne Logue
Meg Loncharic
Maureen Lopresto
Linda Lorah
Patricia Loubeau
Catlin Lowes
Lawrence and Elizabeth Lund
Linda Majewski
Lynette Matter
Colleen McCarthy
Eileen McLaughlin
Mark Middleton
David Mitchell
Berwyn Moore
Pamela Moore
Susan Murawski
Diane Murphy
Alice Niebauer
Edith Ortiz and Edward Konopka
Joe Owens
Karen Parsh
Cyndy Patton
Becky Pomeroy
Brad Prince
Frankie Quinn
Rose Mary Renner
Frank Reusche
Elizabeth Ricke
Doug and Sherry Rieder
Carrie Rodler
Charles and Susan Roehrl

Sunny Saunders
Charles Scalise
Lisbet Searle-White
Jamie Sebrorer
Laura Semple
Cheryl Servidio
Colleen Shaffer
Linda Shepard
Gena Shingle
Jean Shirley
Leshia Simmons
Julie and Tim Skelly
Kyle Skitka
Cassandra Smiley
Stephen Smith
Christine Spare and Michael Waugh
Jane Springer
Dorothy Stoner, O.S.B.
Patricia and Michael Tellers
Russ Thompson
Seth Trott
Michele Vahey
Ashley Wagle and John Szczotka
Tate Weber
William Welch
Joshua Williams
Leslie Williamson
Ann Wisniewski
Michelle Woltz
Donna Wood
Philip Zacks
Debbie and James Zahler

"What do you see? Where does your imagination go? Two people weathering the effects of a storm and turbulent seas, looking through the "CLEAR" lens of a telescope toward the horizon, searching for fair weather and calm seas and guided by the compass of the JES.

A compass that has directed us to a journey to the frontier of space (remember when people thought the world was flat), a compass that has exposed us to the world's conflicts and a presentation of what a peace proposal for Ukraine and Russia might resemble.

To listen to the inspirational messages of a former President and Vice President of the United States and a former pro football player, who didn't talk about throwing a football, but about perseverance. To our regional academics, who share their research on a variety of topics, helping us to separate fact from fiction and to challenge all of us to "THINK".

But, maybe what is most important is the many challenges and opportunities we face as a community, from the recent presentation by the JES Civic Leadership Academy addressing the Population Decline in Erie County to the Child Care Crisis and the lasting effects to our community and our children's future that was presented last year. Just imagine, all of this was presented and discussed in the past two years.

So, look at the photo again and what do you see? Not just two individuals but Jeanette and Jim, willing to participate in studying the past, examining the present and exploring the future. If YOU believe in the mission and would like to join us on our voyage with the JES as our compass and guide, come aboard and sail with us. 'I WONDER WHAT'S NEXT?'

*James R. "Doc" Hertner, Vietnam Veteran, USN/USMC
JES Member since 2020*



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

THE JES RECOGNIZES OUR VERY GENEROUS DONORS

Mary Anne Albaugh
 Jennifer Allen
 Jeanne Baker
 Janice M. Baker
 Jacob and MacKenzie Bartko
 Kathleen Bartko
 Suzanne and Michael Baum
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 Hagen History Center
 Priscilla Hamilton
 Margaret Hauser
 Joyce and Fran Hayden
 Elaine Heiden
 Nancy Herold
 John Holmberg
 Deborah Hunt
 David and Jessica Hunter
 Sylvia Jarema
 Jewish Community Council of Erie (JCC)
 Thomas Kennedy
 Knox Law
 Stephen Krivonak
 Russ and Jean Lafuria
 Chris and Vickie Lampe
 Jeff Lane
 Elaine Laniewicz
 Greg and Lisa LaRocca
 LECOM Health
 Mary Lincoln
 Lincoln Recycling
 Logistics Plus
 Atty Al and Josie Lubiejewski
 Judy Lynch
 Marquette Savings Bank
 Christina and Robert Marsh
 Dale and Lynn McBrier
 James McBrier
 Maureen McClure



Kathryn DiVittorio, JES Raimy Fellow, asks a question to Neil deGrasse Tyson that amuses the crowd during his live audience Q&A.

Virginia McDermott
 Sarah and Bruce McWilliams
 Menagerie Studio
 Clemence Mershon
 Chris and Jeffrey Merz
 Wendy Miller
 Denise and Butch Mullen
 National Fuel
 Douglas Nichols
 Chelsea Oliver
 Darby Patton Scalise
 Linda Payne
 Charles Perrotta
 Cynthia Peters
 Erica Peterson
 Maureen Plunkett
 PNC Bank
 Barbara Pollock
 Phyllis Pope
 Stephen and Penelope Porter
 Printing Concepts, Inc.
 RBC Wealth Management
 Martha Reddinger
 Marilyn Redenius
 John and Bette Reilly
 Albert Richardson
 Christine Riehl
 Robert Roddy
 Romolo Chocolates
 Andy and Judy Roth
 Marian Sama
 Raymond and Jacqueline Sammartino
 Dave Sample
 Sunny Saunders
 Kevin and Michele Scully
 Erin Sekerak
 Elizabeth Sesler
 John Caleb Shirey
 Jacqueline Smith
 Christopher Snedden
 Timothy Spaeder
 Ben Spегgen and Michelle Ellia
 Richard Speicher
 Karen Staab
 Jeffrey Styborski
 Kristin Talarico
 TalkErie.com
 Jessica and Nick Taylor
 Andy Tellers
 Shauna Thompson
 Tom Ridge Environmental Center (TREC)
 Gina Walmsley
 Shawn Waskiewicz
 Nancy Weil
 Adam Welsh
 Robert Wertz
 Gwendolyn White
 Drew Whiting
 Wm. T. Spaeder
 Perry Wood
 WQLN



A group of Ursuline College students traveled together to take advantage of seeing President Barack Obama with their free student tickets.

THE AGORA CIRCLE

A collaborative giving initiative empowering the sustainable growth of the JES.

The Agora Circle derives its name from the ancient Greek gathering place where citizens met in civil discourse to discuss the important matters of the day, exchange ideas across fields of expertise, and work together to strengthen their communities.

In 2024, we invited our most committed supporters to deepen their engagement with the JES by becoming Founding Members of the Agora Circle. In 2025, these members played a vital role in advancing the Society's mission—supporting expanded programming, enhancing opportunities for dialogue with distinguished visiting scholars and speakers, and helping broaden access to JES programs through digital recording and sharing. During the year, we were also pleased to welcome new members into the Agora Circle, and we extend our sincere gratitude for their generosity and commitment to the JES.

As the JES continues to grow, the Agora Circle remains essential to sustaining and strengthening our work. We invite others who share our commitment to lifelong learning, civic dialogue, and community progress to join the Agora Circle and help ensure that the JES continues to serve the Erie region for generations to come.



Founding Agora Circle members, from left to right, Sheila Brugger, Loretto Bellicini, and Marian Sama, enjoy a reception prior to the 2025 Global Summit event at TREC.

THANK YOU TO OUR AGORA CIRCLE MEMBERS

**denotes Founding Member*

Jennifer Allen	Leigh Kostis*	Keith & Linda McGarvey*	Timothy Sennett
Jeanne Baker*	Greg & Lisa LaRocca	Denise & Butch Mullen*	Tom & Janice Shower*
Pierre & Loretto Bellicini*	Mary Lincoln*	Chuck & Janet Peters*	Tim Spaeder*
Carol & Jeffery Blake*	Judy Lynch*	Delores Pasiecznik	Ben Spегgen & Michelle Ellia*
Kathryn Benison	Dale McBrier	Elaine & Klaus Retzlaff*	Thomas Tupitza*
Sheila Brugger*	Diana McBrier Wolfe	Christine Riehl*	Susan Wellman
Charles & Renee Caryl*	Maureen McClure*	Andrew & Judy Roth*	
Diane Chido*	Christine McClure	Marian Sama*	
Ferki & Katya Ferati*	Pierre & Kathy McCormick*	Marlena Sanchez	
David & Jessica Hunter*	Edwin McKean*	Joyce Savocchio*	

For information on becoming an Agora Circle Member, please contact Christine Gerlock at 914.459.6000 or gerlock@jeserlc.org.

BY THE NUMBERS

With an expanding team and the support of our Scholars-in-Residence, community partners, and additional sponsors, we've delivered a dynamic range of publications, programs, and digital content. Grounded in the JES mission, our work continues to reach and resonate with diverse audiences, with 2025 marking our largest overall attendance to date. These numbers reflect a year defined by collaboration, momentum, and growth. Together, they underscore that the JES is not only growing—but rising to new heights in influence, reach, and community impact. (Pictured: Juan Williams, author and political analyst, left, takes an audience question directly from Kyra Taylor, Executive Director of Erie's Black Wall Street, during his Global Summit event. EBWS was one of over 40 community partners we worked with to ensure Global Summit XVII was a success.)

30,880

TOTAL IN-PERSON
EVENT ATTENDEES

TWO

FORMER PRESIDENTS HOSTED
(US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA &
KOSOVO PRESIDENT ATIFETE JAHAGA)

156

TOTAL PROGRAMS

43

NATIONAL NEWS
OUTLETS THAT
COVERED GLOBAL
SUMMIT XVII

29

NEW JCLA
GRADUATES

SIX

NEW RAIMY
FELLOWS

4,655

NEW JES EMAIL
SUBSCRIBERS

88

TOTAL
PUBLICATIONS

2,429

FIRST-TIME JES
EVENT ATTENDEES

1,589

NEW JES YOUTUBE
SUBSCRIBERS

CONTINUING TO SERVE AS THE COMMUNITY'S MARKETPLACE FOR IDEAS

Providing a welcoming gathering place where curious learners can engage in idea-sharing through lectures, panel presentations, discussions, seminars, and courses remains instrumental in executing the JES's mission. Since it opened its doors in 2008, the JES has grown its educational opportunities in volume, reach, and depth. 2025 marks another milestone year with 156 programs.

A hallmark of the Jefferson Educational Society has been – and continues to be – serving as a place where people who don't necessarily see eye to eye can gather shoulder to shoulder to learn from and with each other in the spirit of increasing their knowledge, expanding their views, and appreciating differing points of view while finding common ground upon which they can agree. What follows is a snapshot of the scores of events in 2025 – all made possible by JES members; event attendees; local, regional, national, and international experts; the JES team members and volunteers; and strong partnerships in the community and beyond.

In 2025, on the JES campus at 32nd and State streets, the think tank built upon the foundation it has become known and respected for by inviting in local and regional experts, scholars, and practitioners to share their knowledge, insight, expertise, and work with an inquisitive audience in open dialogue. This includes the 15-plus Community Conversations, a lunch-and-learn series that invites local leaders and civic stakeholders to gather around updates on community-based organizations, initiatives, and plans, made free and open to the public thanks to support from the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority.



1. Dr. Rhonda Matthews, Chief Operating Officer of Erie's Black Wall Street, presents, "They Not Like Us: Kendrick Lamar, Drake, and the Commodification of a Rap Beef," to kick off the EBWS partnership "Pop Culture Lecture Series." 2. Hagen History Center Director of Programming and Visitor Experience and 2024 JCLA graduate Adam Macrino looks over artifacts after one of many HHC partnership programs. 3. Shateria Franklin, a 2024 JCLA graduate, presents a Community Conversation about the nonprofit she founded, Destiny of Our Daughters.

YEAR-ROUND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AT THE JES:

FEBRUARY

Partnered with Gannon University to host "Resistance through Music: Florence Price," featuring Grammy Award Winner Michelle Cann and Erie Philharmonic Orchestra members.



MARCH

Shared the research of JES Rainy Fellows, Kathryn DiVittorio with "Realizing the Need for an Autism Support School and Hub in Rural Pennsylvania" debuting at the Corry Higher Education Council, and Alyson Eagle's research through a day-long, workshop-styled conference, "Still We Rise: Overcoming Barriers of Aspiring Female Leaders" at the JES.



APRIL

Commemorated the Bicentennial of Lafayette's Farewell Tour in the United States, exploring "His Time on the Trail and Impact through History" with historian Richard Arthur, beginning at the JES and continuing on to satellite locations.

MAY

Took publications "from the page to the stage," hosting JES Scholars-in-Residence David Frew and Andrew Roth in conversation following each notching 200-plus publications for the JES.

Celebrated the life and legacy of Erie's own professional and college football Hall of Famer Fred Biletnikoff – discussing his Erie-upbringing and its impact and influence on his accomplishments both on and off the field.

JUNE

Learned about "The Erie Accent" – what it is, and how it has changed over the past century – from Keelan Evanini, linguist and artificial intelligence research scientist.



JULY

Welcomed back famed historian Robert Garland, the Roy D. and Margaret B. Wooster Emeritus Professor of the Classics at Colgate University, for "A Day in History" – a five-part lecture series exploring "what a difference a single day makes" in history.

Continued JES Scholar-in-Residence Michael DeSanctis's "Sacred Spaces" walking tours, visiting St. John the Baptist and St. Stanislaus churches.

Like the support of the Community Conversation series, which brought in more than 600 attendees, other work the JES Team performs does not happen alone. In 2025, the JES continued its partnership with the **Hagen History Center** to host its Doris Becker Lecture Series with some of the most popular events in 2025 spanning a range of topics – from wine to American architecture and the “Erie accent.”

From “good heart health” to “living successfully, aging successfully,” the JES grew its health-focused series in partnership with **LECOM Health** in 2025, hosting seven events and more than doubling the average attendance since its launch in 2024. In 2025, the JES also partnered with **Erie’s Black Wall Street** to introduce the “Pop Culture Lecture Series,” looking at Super Bowl halftime performances, generational divides, and more.

But the reach of the JES goes beyond its own brick-and-mortar space.

Thanks to the JES’s continued partnership with area organizations, and with the continued support of Erie Insurance to keep admission free of charge, the JES’s Satellite Programming Initiative grew from some 40 events in 2024 to over 50 in 2025, reaching more than 1,200 residents throughout Erie County. But knowledge isn’t just shared and received shoulder to shoulder today. Just as the JES Team did in 2024, they extended the think tank’s learning opportunities screen to screen into the digital educational arena thanks to a strong partnership and working relationship with CAM (Community Access Media). Many of the JES’s in-person events are live-streamed, the videos of which are then posted to the JES’s YouTube channel.

Additionally, the JES continued its participation in the **Heartlands Transformation Network**, a transatlantic collaborative partnership dedicated to closing geographic economic divides and reconnecting residents of rural and former industrial heartland communities to economic opportunity. The JES helped convene network members through the U.S. and abroad for internationally reaching virtual events discussing policies and practices that restore community pride and optimism about the future and diminish the appeal of polarizing, resentment-driven, isolationist and ethnonationalist political movements that threaten our democracies.



2.



3.



AUGUST

Returned to Presque Isle State Park for JES Scholar-in-Residence David Frew’s “Accidental Paradise Tour” to learn about the history, geology, and more of the treasured park.

Explored the progress being made toward a “Binational Great Lakes Waterfront Trail” with visiting speaker John Hartig, member of the U.S. Great Lakes Waterfront Trail Project Team.

Examined “The Founding in Perspective” – looking at America’s Founding Period through the lens of those making and shaping history with Jay Cost, the Gerald R. Ford Nonresident Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.



ONGOING

Continued both the Great Conversations course, in which participants read a range of materials – from the classics to notable contemporary works – and Great Decisions, a monthly course in partnership with the Foreign Policy Association in which participants dive into critical, global issues with national- and local-level implications.

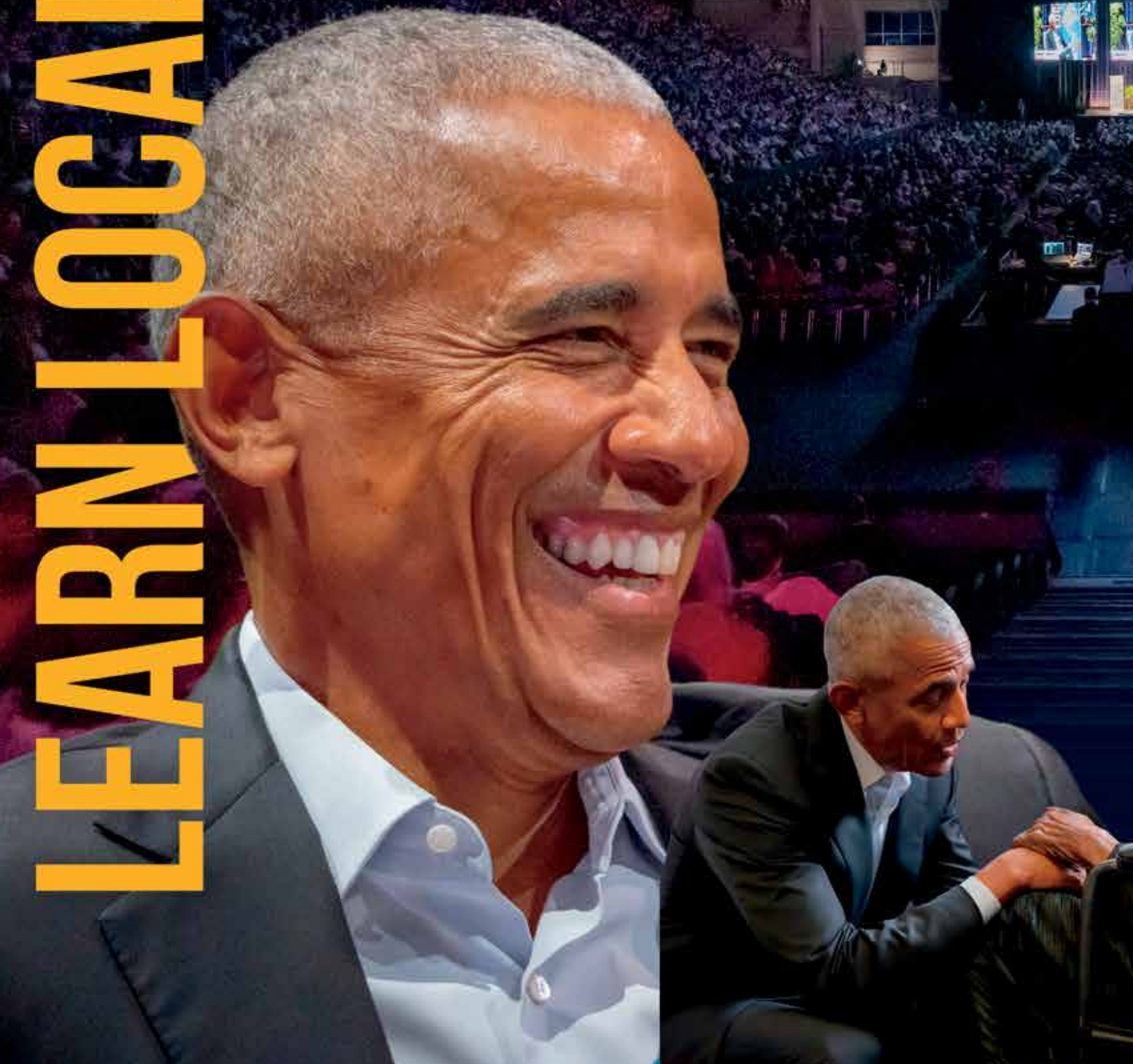
SEPTEMBER

Welcomed President Atifete Jahaga, who served as the president of Kosovo from 2011 until 2016, for a special Community Conversation moderated by JES President Ferki Ferati, a Kosovar refugee who came to Erie in 1999 and was a part of the JES’s founding team.





LEARN LOCALLY.



President Barack Obama on stage at the Erie Insurance Arena on September 16, 2025, to kick off Global Summit XVII with nearly 8,000 in-person attendees. **Foreground, from left:** President Barack Obama smiles on stage, greets Susan Hunter, age 102, and meets with students from the Erie School District prior to the event.

THINK GLOBALLY.





THE GLOBAL SUMMIT IS LIKE SOMETHING PEOPLE CANNOT ACCESS UNLESS THEY GO OUTSIDE OF ERIE. THIS IS WHAT THEY LOOK FOR AT NATIONAL CONFERENCES OR ON YOUTUBE — **WHEN IT'S RIGHT HERE.**

- ANGELIA S., JES MEMBER

”

Global Summit XVII: Rising Voices, Rising Ideas

**WORLD-CLASS THINKERS & LEADERS
ONCE AGAIN GATHER IN ERIE TO EXPLORE
THE IDEAS SHAPING OUR FUTURE.**

In 2025, the JES welcomed nationally and internationally recognized leaders to Erie for Global Summit XVII. The series opened with a historic conversation with President Barack Obama at the Erie Insurance Arena — the largest audience in Global Summit history — and for any single, ticketed educational event in Erie. Additional speakers included Neil deGrasse Tyson, Vice President Mike Pence, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Larry Sabato, and Jim Kelly.

Through conversations like these, the Summit continues to bring global perspectives and meaningful civic dialogue to the Erie community.

PREVIOUS GLOBAL SUMMIT SPEAKERS (2009-2025)

2009: E.J. Dionne · Kevin Fickenscher, M.D. · George S. Howard · Stephen Porter · William A. Smith · 2010: Paul Kennedy · Elaine C. Kamarck · Harvey A. Bender · G. Terry Madonna · Dave Porter · Alan J. Russell · 2011: Alice M. Rivlin · General Michael Hayden · Joel Barker · Freddie H. Fu, M.D. · Francis Fukuyama · Steve Scully · Michael J. Sogger · 2012: Karl Rove · David Brooks · Ira Byock, M.D. · Barry Casselman · Tom Flynn · Robert Kirschner · Norman Ornstein · 2013: Harry Markopolos · Howard Dean, M.D. · Crislynn D'Souza-Schorey · David Gergen · William Kristol · Brian Lamb · Thomas E. Mann · Ian Morris · Richard Norton Smith · Edith Widder · 2014: Sister Joan Chittister · Donna Brazile · Stephanie Burt · Laura Bush · Bruce Katz · Charles C. Mann · Michele Ridge · Gregory Sivani · Michael Steele · 2015: Cokie Roberts · Danielle Allen · Anthony Atala, M.D. · Nile Gardiner · Norman Gevitz · Bas Lansdrop · Aaron David Miller · Eric Raimy · Darrell West · Gov. Tom Wolf · 2016: Doris Kearns Goodwin · Antoine von Agtmael · Fred Barnes · Rev. Jeffrey Brown · Lesley Lee Francis · Robert Hass · Andres Lozano, M.D. · M.R. O'Connor · David Orr · Gov. Tom Ridge · Donald Shaehy · 2017: Andrew Card · Bruce Katz · Jay Cost · Steve Scully · Philip Rucker · Tara Palmeri · Bryon York · Douglas Brinkley · Jackson Janes · Caitlin Welsh · Ellen Jorgensen · Lt. Gen. James Dubik, Ret. · 2018: Michael Eric Dyson · David Ignatius · Ashley Swearingin · Leonard Calabrese, D.O. · Sebastian Gorka · Gen. Michael Hayden · Steve Scully · Elise Jordan · Bill Pante · Ann Compton · James Fallows · Deborah Fallows · Chris Matthews · (Doris Kearns Goodwin) · (Howard Dean, M.D.) · 2019: Camille Busette · Patricia Gilbert · (Nile Gardiner) · Avi Loeb · Chuck Hagel · Gov. Tom Ridge · Sean Spicer · George Will · Karen Tumulty · Alexi McCammond · Mary Katharine Ham · Steve Scully · Michael Smerconish · Edna Greene Medford · Susan Page · Eleanor Smeal · 2021 (Virtual): Camille Busette · April Ryan · Rashawn Ray · Ali Zaidi · Rev. Jeffrey Brown · Gerald Selb · Michael Saag, M.D. · Steve Scully · Karen Tumulty · Leana Wen, M.D. · David Ignatius · Christopher Hill · James Fallows · Deborah Fallows · Steven Ascher · Jeanne Jordan · 2021: President George W. Bush · Doris Kearns Goodwin · Jeffrey Rosen · Andrew Card · Thomas "Mack" McLarty · Barbara Perry · Stacy Cordery · Anita McBride · Steve Scully · Clayola Brown · DeWitt Walton · Robert Pape · 2022: Judy Woodruff · Al Hunt · John Calipari · Jon Wertheim · Karl Rove · Elizabeth Strickler · Anahita Panahi · José Muñoz · Reuben Jacobson · Fiona Hill · Jay Cost · John C. Austin · James Fallows · Rev. Charles Brock · Tom Rodett · John Dickerson · Allen Carroll · Avi Loeb · Dawn Wright · Josh Fryday · Baher Ghobadi · Steve Scully · 2023: Val Demings · Pyster Baker · Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha · Brian Freedman · Richard Florida · Bruce Katz · Matt Weidinger · David Urban · Rich Lesser · Richard Reeves · Della Clark · Tom Nichols · Robert Garland · Maj. General Edward Bolton, Jr., Ret. · Laura Coates · (Karen Tumulty) · (Michael Steele) · Steve Scully · 2024: Liz Cheney · Sister Joan Chittister · Stephen A. Smith · Jon Wertheim · Charles Marohn · Tristan Hoag · Heamer Cox Richardson · Lara Schwartz · Michael Strain · Joe Davis · Marian L. Tupy · Fred Blumenthal · Maj. Gen. Ed Bolton, Ret. · Angela G. Neal · Dr. Karen Bolton · Lia Van Lieu · Harold Holzer · Chris Matthews · David Urban · Tara Setmayer · Eddin Glaude Jr. · 2025: President Barack Obama · Jane Aburckle Petro, M.D. · David LaMotte · Lindsay Chervinsky · Chris Whipple · Jim Kelly · Mark Gitenstein · Adrian "Woj" Wojnarowski · Neil deGrasse Tyson · Richard J. Berry · Greg Fischer · William Paduano · Vice President Mike Pence · Paul McNulty · Michael McFall · Yvonne Dreher · Zach Melnick · Mike Thomas · Journey Gunderson · Charles Eli · Juan Williams · Larry Sabato · Henry Louis Gates Jr.



Above: Over 3,000 attendees await Neil deGrasse Tyson at the Bayfront Convention Center during Global Summit 2025. From bottom to top: Previous Global Summit headliners, Michael Eric Dyson (2018), Susan Page (2019), President George W. Bush (2021), Judy Woodruff (2022), Val Demings (2023), and Liz Cheney (2024).

*Indicates multiple Global Summit appearances.



"THE JES IS A *force of community* IN YOUR TOWN."
- NEIL DEGRASSE TYSON

Above: Several St. Bonaventure University alumni gather with Adrian "Woj" Wojnarowski after his event, including our own, JES Scholar-in-Residence and former SBU president Dr. Andrew Roth. 1. JES Board Trustee Chris Riehl hugs her long-time friend and the 2025 Thomas B. Hagen Dignitas award winner Dr. Jane Arbuckle Petro. 2. Historian Lindsay Chervinsky gives advice to the young audience members during her talk. 3. Charles Liu changes from suit jacket to red fleece, Mr. Rogers style, while transitioning from lecture to fireside chat. 4. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. poses with Erie community member Jamil Lindsey prior to the Grand Finale event. 5. A thoughtful moment in the audience. 6. Former Buffalo Bills quarterback Jim Kelly throws footballs from the stage to audience members. 7. Logistics Plus President and life-long Bills fan Jim Berlin leads the crowd in a familiar chant.





Thomas B. Hagen Dignitas Award



Each year since 2011 during the Global Summit, the JES recognizes an Erie native, or someone who has spent significant time in the community, with the Thomas B. Hagen Dignitas Award. The award, named for one of Erie's leading citizens, Thomas B. Hagen, honors individuals who have achieved greatness in their fields, made significant contributions to the vitality of American democracy, and have a lasting impact on society. The Latin word "Dignitas" is known to mean "first among equals" and was reserved in Ancient Greece (and later in Rome) for citizens whose civic behavior exemplified the virtues of both dignity and loyalty, which were considered the highest ideals in Athens.

Complete list for past honorees: jeserie.org/global-summit

2025 Global Summit Sponsors

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Brock Institute's Work Continues Under New Leadership from a Familiar Face

In the spirit of the late Rev. Charles Brock, the Brock Institute launched a new chapter in 2025 under new director Steve Scully, who succeeds Dr. Andrew Roth. Both leaders followed the themes of Brock's extraordinary life: **Work passionately for justice, education, and democracy.**

As a matter of policy, that translated to nine popular programs in the winter, spring, and summer of 2025, as well as the Global Summit speaker series.

Here's a recap:

- **March:** Dr. Ferki Ferati, JES President, launched the democracy series with "The 21st Century: A Bad Time to be a Tyrant." It chronicled the lives of infamous world leaders dating to the Romans and how they inevitably met their demise.
- **April:** A panel of experts; Molly Reynolds of the Brookings Institution, Jay Cost of the American Enterprise Institute, and the Hill's political correspondent Amie Parnes reviewed the sweeping and often unorthodox actions of the Trump administration's first 100 days.
- **May:** A large community salute greeted Erie Insurance at its 100th anniversary. With Steve Scully serving as moderator, Erie Insurance's present and past VIPs Tom Hagen, Tim NeCastro, and Marty Eisert, recounted the company's history through poignant and often colorful stories.
- **August:** One of the Brock Institute's and JES's highlights of the year was a five-day series of programs on the American founders featuring George Washington, John and Abigail Adams, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. Political scientist and historian Jay Cost coordinated and presented each program to the delight of large audiences.
- **October:** As part of the Global Summit, former Ambassador Mark Gitenstein presented the "The European Union," in the years following its creation in 1993.

The JES/Brock Institute lecture series continues in 2026 under the stewardship of Scully, the Emmy Award-winning broadcast journalist who hosts, "The Briefing with Steve Scully" on Sirius XM's POTUS channel.

Page 16: Previous page at top from left; Chris Riehl, JES Board of Trustee, Hon. Joe Schember, former Erie City Mayor, Carolyn Becker, Dr. Jane Arbuckle Petro, 2025 Thomas B. Hagen Dignitas Honoree, Dr. Ferki Ferati, JES President, and Ben Speggen, JES Vice President. Right, Previous Dignitas Award Honorees, from bottom to top; Lt. General James Dubik (2017), James and Deborah Fallows (2018), Eleanor Smeal (2019), Dr. Robert Pape (2021), Major General Ed Bolton (2023), and Fred Biletnikoff (2024).

Page 17: Above; Steve Scully moderates, "What's Happening in Washington, D.C.? A Look at the First 100 Days of the Trump Presidency" featuring Jay Cost, Amie Parnes, and Molly Reynolds in April 2025. Right; Rev. Charles Brock receives the 2022 Thomas B. Hagen Dignitas Award from his longtime friend, Tom Hagen.



WHAT IS MEGA ISSUES EDUCATION?

The Brock Institute stands for integrative education, focusing on the significant issues of the day – war, violence, American leaders, ideology, religions, inequality, poverty, gender, environment, science, and culture wars.

Issues are examined from many viewpoints in a scholarly manner presenting explanations and fact-based arguments from historical, political, and theological points of view. Having taught religion and political science at Oxford UK for 35 years and PSU-Behrend for 20 years, Rev. Brock always emphasized well-rounded education and critical thinking.

B R  C K
I N S T I T U T E
 FOR MEGA ISSUES EDUCATION

DYNAMIC. INTERACTIVE. COLLABORATIVE.

The JES puts a premium on ensuring that those three words guide the experience of the Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy (JCLA) participants. Launched in 2015 as an annual endeavor, the JCLA prepares Erie professionals for a meaningful engagement in the community through an experience that includes: a retreat to Harrisburg to meet with top elected officials and expert policy advisers; countywide sessions to learn the form and function of local governments; and the production of publishable research to address critical issues facing the region. The 2025 cohort graduated 29 individuals, the largest cohort to date.



1. The 2025 JCLA cohort joins State Rep. Ryan Bizarro and Lt. Governor Austin Davis in Harrisburg during its retreat. 2. Dalaysha Strickland poses on the PA House Floor with Speaker of the PA House of Representatives JoAnna McClinton. 3. Carlos Mora Rangel chats in Harrisburg with Dr. Kyle Kopko, Executive Director for the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. 4. Rimaz Mustfa meets with Kosovo President Atifete Jahaga during her visit to Erie.

The 2025 JCLA cohort was charged with addressing population decline in Erie County – an urgent challenge with wide-ranging implications for economic vitality, workforce sustainability, and community growth. Through its time in Harrisburg and collaboration across the region, the cohort focused on how Erie County can better position itself to attract, retain, and grow its population.

Erie County has experienced steady population loss in recent years, driven by factors such as workforce migration, limited housing diversity, and challenges in shaping a cohesive regional identity. The cohort sought to understand how local leaders, organizations, and residents perceive these challenges and what strategies could most effectively reverse current trends.

Using a mixed methods approach, the cohort's report, *"Addressing Population Decline in Erie County, Pennsylvania Using Unified Messaging,"* identified several key themes: the importance of consistent and compelling regional branding, the need to align stakeholders around a shared narrative, the role of quality-of-life assets in attracting new residents, and the opportunity to better leverage Erie's existing strengths.

Addressing population decline will require coordinated action at the local and regional levels. The cohort's primary recommendation is the development and adoption of a unified messaging strategy that clearly communicates Erie County's value proposition. Strong alignment among public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders will be critical to ensuring

that efforts to attract and retain residents are both effective and sustainable.

The full report and recommendations can be found on the JES website.



THE JES CIVIC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CRACKED SOMETHING OPEN IN ME

academically, professionally, and personally;

BETWEEN THE MENTORSHIP, THE SPEAKER SERIES VIA GLOBAL SUMMIT, THE RELATIONSHIPS, AND THE ACCESS TO ROOMS MOST PEOPLE WILL NEVER SEE INSIDE, I LEFT A DIFFERENT PERSON THAN I ARRIVED. I CAME IN THINKING I UNDERSTOOD LEADERSHIP, AND THE JEFFERSON SHOWED ME

I was just getting started. -THERESA LAIRD, 2025 JCLA GRADUATE

JOINING AN ALUMNI NETWORK OF 267, OUR 2025 JCLA GRADUATES:



- Chelcie Alcorn, *Erie Dems*
- Kara Dahl, *Corry Higher Education Council*
- Nathan Ditonto, *LECOM*
- DeAngelo Dixon, *Community Access Media*
- Melissa J. Dixon, *LECOM*
- Chloe Forbes, *Jefferson Educational Society*
- Nick Gardunio, *Sander's Markets*
- Paul Kafando, *Bleem Properties*
- Samson Kafando, *Bleem Properties*
- Amy Kirkham, *Erie Insurance*
- Theresa Laird, *Coalition Pathways, Inc.*
- Jessica Markham, *L'Arche Erie*
- Andrea Moffett, *Agresti Real Estate*
- Carlos Mora Rangel, *Erie United*
- Rimaz Mustafa, *Knox Law Firm*
- Michaele Jones, *Widget Financial*
- Lori Radder Spicer, *City of Erie*
- Michelle Robles, *GECAC*
- Scott Sheffer, *Erie Insurance*
- Thyme Smiley, *PA Tax Revenue Office*
- Dalaysha Strickland, *Our Little Star Preschool Academy*
- Curtis Taylor, *Authentic Wellness & Empowerment*
- Vlad Tchounga, *WQLN PBS NPR*
- Shauna Thompson, *Widget Financial*
- Cassidy Utegg, *Painted Finch*
- Mary Wassell, *City of Erie*
- Savannah Wilson, *Voices of Independence*



JCLA ALUMNI ON THE RISE

Bottom to top; Melinda Hall (2021) and Tiffany LaVette (2016) were two of four JCLA alumni to be honored by Mercy Center for Women's 2026 Women Making History, they were joined by (not pictured) Kat DiVitorrio (2024) and Alivia Haibach (2024). Angie Amatangelo (2024) was elected as Vice President of the Erie City School Board, she serves with (not pictured) Dr. Jay Brennaman (2016) who was elected President. Dr. Jim Wertz (2018) was elected to Erie County Council. Dr. Tyler Titus (2017) was elected as Erie City Council President. Susannah Faulkner (2021) is the new Executive Director of Erie Arts & Culture. Dr. Ben Wilson (2021) is the new Executive Director of the Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC).

JES PUBLICATIONS: TELLING THE STORIES OF THE PEOPLE, IDEAS, AND LEGACIES SHAPING OUR REGION AND BEYOND

Through thoughtful writing and research, the JES continues to chronicle and tell the stories that define Erie while connecting it to broader conversations. From tributes honoring local leaders to series exploring history, democracy, and modern challenges, JES publications elevate ideas and preserve legacy. In 2025, this work expanded in both volume and reach, amplifying its impact across communities near and far, and totaling 88 publications in 2025.

TRIBUTES DOCUMENT LOCAL LEGACIES

From Thomas B. Hagen's leadership to the story of civic leader Denise Illig Robison Mullen, and lessons from businessman Bruce Raimy, this year's tributes captured in words three extraordinary legacies that have shaped the Erie region and beyond.

In May, Scholar-in-Residence David Frew documented how Bruce Raimy and his brother Gray transformed a welding business into a regional powerhouse and molded a broader philosophy of community involvement that eventually helped create the Jefferson Educational Society with other founders brought together by Dr. William P. Garvey.

In June, the husband-wife duo of Dr. David Frew and Mary Ann Frew teamed up to paint a portrait in prose of Denise Illig Robison Mullen, whose background in politics with the Kennedys took some unconventional turns before she was appointed Gov. Tom Ridge's secretary of aging.

Her life, rooted in the health and responsibility of others, is what led her to be a founding member of the Jefferson, helping to shape the think tank since its inception.

Last but far from least, Captain Erie himself, Thomas B. Hagen, was recognized in December, with Scholar-in-Residence Andrew Roth writing about the enduring service that Hagen has championed his entire career. After helping to grow Erie Insurance into a Fortune 500 company, he continued his philanthropic efforts beside his late wife, Susan Hirt Hagen, revolutionizing the public school system and creating the Historic Erie Preservation Trust.

These commemorative pieces turned the spotlight on leaders who continue to leave remarkable legacies in the area for generations to come.

 Follow JES Publications on Substack!
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THE JES SCHOLARS-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

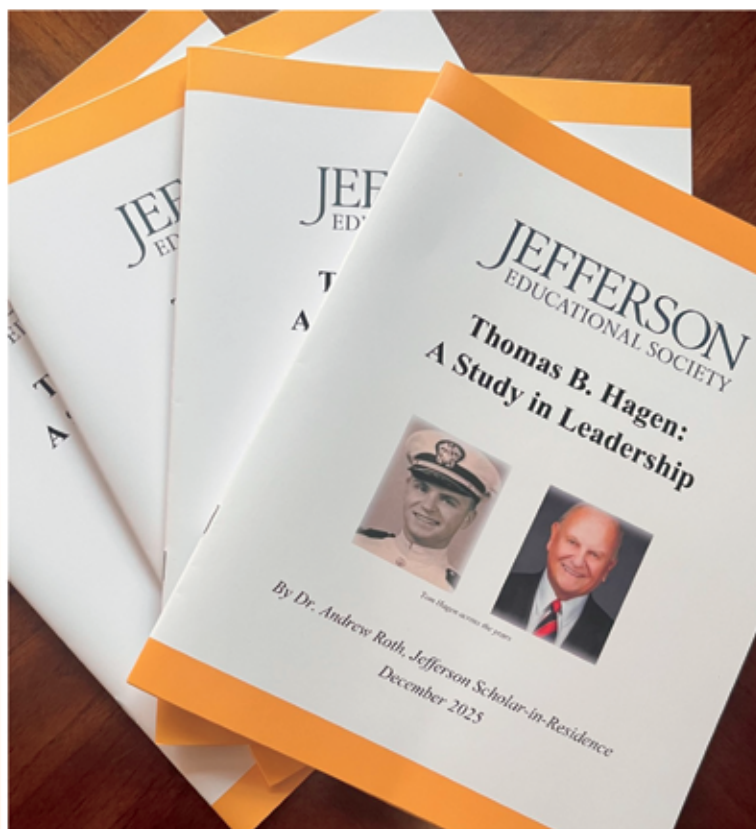
The JES Scholars-in-Residence Program reflects a continued commitment to deepening its role as the Erie region's leading think tank for community progress. By bringing together a diverse group of experts, the program strengthens the JES's ability to generate timely publications, deliver engaging lectures, and guide meaningful research.

In 2025, the JES's 11 Scholars-in-Residence contributed across disciplines, with many balancing both writing and public programming to expand the think tank's reach and impact. Their work not only advances thoughtful dialogue within the community but also positions the JES as a trusted source for insight, analysis, and ideas—both locally and beyond.

Scholar-in Residence headshots from left to right; Lena Surzhko-Harned, Ph.D., Michael DeSanctis, Ph.D., Diane Chido, M.S., M.A., and Parris Baker, Ph.D.



- Parris Baker, Ph.D. – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Diane Chido, M.S., M.A. – Writer, lecturer, course instructor
- Michael DeSanctis, Ph.D. – Lecturer
- Paul Gambill, M.A. – Program Development
- David Frew, Ph.D. – Writer, author, lecturer
- Baher Ghosheh, Ph.D. – Immigration, author, lecturer
- Johnny Johnson, M.Ed. – Education, lecturer
- Judy Lynch, Ph.D. – Decadian Scholar, writer, author, lecturer
- Christine Riehl, M.P.P. – Program and Course Development
- Andrew Roth, Ph.D. – Writer, author, lecturer
- Lena Surzhko-Harned, Ph.D. – Writer and lecturer



OTHER WRITING STANDOUTS

Many articles were dedicated to local history, global conflict, and complex issues in an actionable way.

There were nearly a hundred publications in total, including multiple series: Lessons on democratic erosion from autocratic countries by Dr. Lena Surzhko-Harned; how modern men face social crises, spearheaded by Dr. Jeff Bloodworth; and the re-thinking of traditional journalism to meet modern times by Chloe Forbes.

Additionally, the JES's continued partnership and work in the **Heartlands Transformation Network** led to an expanded international reach. Dedicated to closing geographic economic divides and reconnecting residents of rural and former industrial heartland communities to economic opportunity, the Heartlands Transformation Network is a transatlantic collaboration of idea-sharing and information dissemination between universities, think tanks, and other NGOs.

"Overcoming the 'Greenlash,'" a paper co-authored by John Austin, senior fellow at the Eisenhower Institute and non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, JES Vice President Ben Spегgen, and research assistant Ava Shapiro was published in the Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal following a transatlantic discussion the JES hosted. The JES also co-published the report, "Building on Heritage and Culture: A Path for Community Regeneration," with the Eisenhower Institute. This report, written by Austin and Gettysburg College student Adhara Ayndrila, also stemmed from a conversation the JES hosted.

Above; Physical copies of "Thomas B. Hagen: A Study in Leadership" by Andrew Roth available at the JES or digitally at: jeserie.org/erie-legends-project

Of the nearly hundred publications in 2025

IN TOTAL, THE JES PRODUCED THREE TRIBUTES TO LOCAL LEADERS, 19 "BOOK NOTES" BY DR. ANDREW ROTH, EIGHT ARTICLES ON GLOBAL CONFLICT BY DIANE CHIDO, AND 15 ARTICLES ON LOCAL HISTORY BY DR. DAVID FREW.

THE JES RAIMY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM



The Raimy Fellowship Program, endowed by JES co-founder Bruce Raimy, builds on the JES's commitment to developing thoughtful, engaged civic leaders by pairing leadership theory with real-world application. As an advanced component of the Civic Leadership Academy, the program challenges participants to deepen their understanding of leadership while tackling pressing regional issues.



In 2025, the program reached its largest milestone yet, welcoming six new fellows to complete the program. Fellows expanded their impact through research, public presentations, and the creation of publishable, action-oriented work tied to community priorities. By connecting scholarship with civic engagement, the program continues to cultivate leaders equipped to drive meaningful change across Erie County.

- "Child Care is Workforce Development" by **Matthew Platz, Ph.D.**
- "Crafting Erie's Inclusive Future" by **Alivia Hiabach, M.P.A.**
- "Multi-Generational Leadership: Guiding Age-Diverse Work Groups" by **Bradley Thompson, B.S.**
- "Still We Rise: Overcoming the Barriers of Aspiring Female Leaders" by **Aly Eagle, Ph.D.**
- "Realizing the Need for an Autism Support School and Hub in Rural Pennsylvania" by **Kathryn DiVittorio, B.A.**
- "The Role of Public Libraries in Addressing the Loneliness Crisis" by **Sarah McCall, M.L.S.**



Raimy Fellows headshots from top left to bottom right; Matthew Platz, Ph.D., Alivia Hiabach, M.P.A., Bradley Thompson, B.S., Aly Eagle, Ph.D., Kathryn DiVittorio, B.A., and Sarah McCall, M.L.S. All Raimy Fellows listed at: jeserie.org/raimy-fellowship-program



JES PERSONNEL & BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Pictured, from left to right; Bailey Kroell, Christine Gerlock, Ferki Ferati, Vice President Mike Pence, Ben Speggen, Chelsea Oliver, and Jacob Bartko.

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- Ben Speggen, M.A. – *Vice President*
- Jacob Bartko, A.S.B. – *Vice President of Operations*
- Pat Cuneo, B.A. – *Director of Publications*
- Chelsea Oliver, M.A. – *Director of Marketing & Community Engagement*
- Andrew Roth, Ph.D. – *Director Raimy Fellows Program*
- Steve Scully, M.A. – *Director of the Brock Institute & Senior Advisor of Strategic Development*
- Christine Gerlock, B.A. – *Development Officer*
- Bailey Kroell, B.A. – *Operations and Programs Coordinator*
- Dea Woodward, M.B.A. – *Finance Coordinator*
- Chloe Forbes, B.A. – *Copy Editor*

Support Staff: Olivia Wickline, Leanne Viera, Jamie Breneman, Mikayla Habursky, Luke Andraso, Hayes Miller, and Mia Slater



JES Team headshots, left to right; Pat Cuneo, Steve Scully, Andrew Roth, Dea Woodward, and Chloe Forbes.

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Trustee Emeritas: Thomas B. Hagen

**WE INVITE YOU TO READ THE BIOS OF THE JES TEAM ONLINE:
JESERIE.ORG/ABOUT/ADMINISTRATIVE-TEAM**

FINANCIAL PICTURE

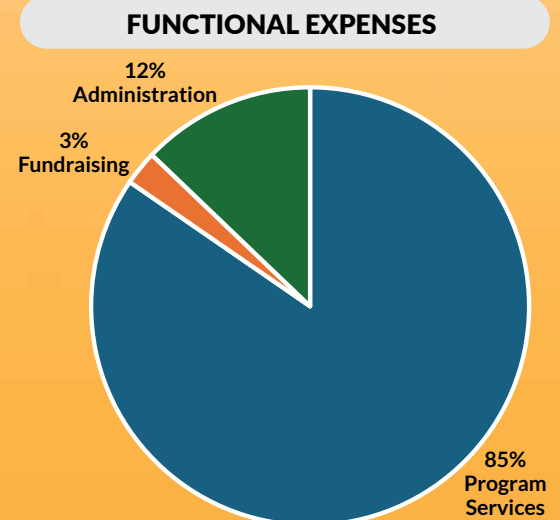
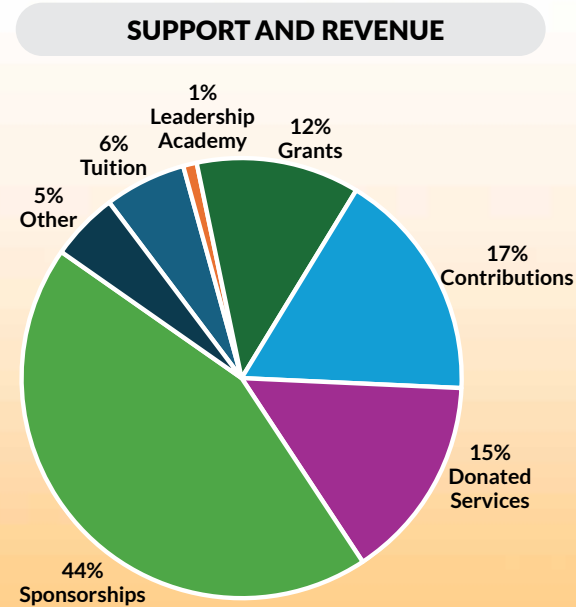
With more than 84% of our expenses dedicated to program services, the JES team remains confident our priorities are in the right order. We remain committed to offering affordable or free programs to our members and the public about important community issues and initiatives. Even as we grow, we continue to allocate funds to our core missions at the JES: the annual Global Summit; year-round programming at the JES home office and five satellite locations; the Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy; publications and books, and community research projects.

JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY OF ERIE, INC.

Statement of Financial Position at August 31, 2025 and 2024 and images updated below.

	August 31	
	2025	2024
ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 101,424	\$ 348,897
Pledges receivable	517,500	435,000
Other receivable	23,866	22,349
Accounts receivable	8,850	31,295
Inventory	51,448	59,361
Prepaid expenses	509,660	59,108
Total current assets	1,212,748	956,010
Property and equipment	1,790,464	1,735,023
Less: accumulated depreciation	724,787	674,013
	1,065,677	1,061,010
Long-term pledges receivable, net of discount of \$74,282 and \$129,757 at August 31, 2025 and 2024, respectively	715,718	920,243
Endowment	623,306	588,799
Right-of-use assets for operating leases, net of accumulated amortization	9,291	-
Total Assets	\$ 3,626,740	\$ 3,526,062

	August 31	
	2025	2024
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities:		
Accounts payable	\$ 123,790	\$ 68,464
Lines of credit	294,982	262,171
Deferred revenue	178,367	150,000
Accrued expenses	16,978	20,933
Operating lease liability, current portion	1,843	-
Current portion of long-term obligations	42,483	42,394
Total current liabilities	658,443	543,962
Long-term obligations, less current portion	332,804	372,893
Operating lease liability, less current portion	7,448	-
Net Assets:		
Without donor restrictions	489,827	804,105
With donor restrictions	2,138,218	1,805,102
Total net assets	2,628,045	2,609,207
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 3,626,740	\$ 3,526,062



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Study **THE PAST.**
Examine **THE PRESENT.**
Explore **THE FUTURE.**

The Jefferson Educational Society of Erie believes in offering courses, seminars, and lectures that explain the ideas that formed the past, assist in exploring the present, and offer guidance in creating the future of the Erie region.

“ I MOST ESPECIALLY WELCOME PEOPLE BEING CIVICALLY ENGAGED AND CARING DEEPLY ABOUT THE WORLD AROUND THEM. THAT'S HOW IT ALL STARTED, 250 YEARS AGO.

WE'VE GOT TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO GET BACK TO THAT AS A SOCIETY, AND I'M GOING TO WORK VERY HARD TO DO MY PART,

AND ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE JEFFERSON ARE DOING YOUR PART, AND I REALLY APPLAUD YOU FOR IT.

I'm grateful for it.”

-GOVERNOR JOSH SHAPIRO
TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 2026

